

# NOBLE HIGH SCHOOL

*At Noble High School, we believe all students can learn when provided with a rigorous and personalized education. We use transparent and democratic practices to foster a community of learners that values trust, decency, and equity for all. By creating authentic opportunities for collaboration, performance, and meaningful work, we seek to prepare students through mastery of skills and knowledge so they may participate capably and responsibly in society.*



## JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS TESTIMONY REGARDING LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS BEING HEARD ON THIS DAY

APRIL 27, 2017

*Respectfully submitted by:*

*Alison L. Kearney, Assistant Principal and Director of Studies, Noble High School (North Berwick, Maine)  
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Director of Guidance

**Blair Marelli**  
Athletic Director

Dear Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Alison Kearney, and I am a resident of Kennebunk, Maine. I also serve as the assistant principal and director of studies at Noble High School in Noble Berwick, Maine. Noble High School educates 1,120 students in grades 8-12 and is a member of M.S.A.D. # 60, which represents the towns of North Berwick, Berwick, and Lebanon, Maine.

I stand here before you today testifying against LD 1416 – An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards.

Noble High School unyieldingly supports the practices and philosophies consistent with standards and proficiency-based education. LD 1416 devalues the work we have done, along with the work of many other Maine schools and districts, toward the implementation of a standards and proficiency-based system of teaching and learning. We support the continued application of the current proficiency-based diploma law within Maine schools, as it ensures the best future for Maine students. The reasons for our support of Maine's current proficiency-based diploma law are described herein:

Proficiency-based education prepares students for life beyond high school. Consistent with Maine's current law, students at Noble High School must demonstrate basic proficiency in the NHS Graduation Standards within eight content areas and NHS 21st Century Learning Expectations (Maine Guiding Principles) in order to be eligible for a diploma. We hold that standards and proficiency-based education legitimizes the value of Maine high school diplomas. We envision that students who receive a diploma can enter the college system without needing remediation; can possess the skills and knowledge necessary to begin training for occupational specialties in the military; and can possess the skills and knowledge necessary to perform successfully in the workplace.

Proficiency-based education upholds current best practices in education. Proficiency-based education is consistent with how students learn. Our proficiency-based educational system embraces the following principles: we communicate to students exactly which skills and knowledge they will study and practice; we create opportunities for practice and check in to see how much students have learned; we design assessments that identify what students know and can do; we give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate proficiency; we demand that students demonstrate proficiency in all standards, not just some; we ensure our grades are accurate indicators of what students know and can do by assigning a separate work habits grade.

Proficiency-based education improves student learning outcomes district-wide. The Noble High School system of standards and proficiency-based education is aligned with the M.S.A.D. #60 (K-12) shared vision. The 3,300 students within our district benefit from personalized, equitable, student-centered learning practices; they will be prepared for 21st century success; they will be a part of a clear academic vision that offers an articulated, guaranteed, and viable curriculum; they will demonstrate proficiencies in Common Core State Standards, Maine Learning Results, and Next Generation Science Standards; they will benefit from enhanced school and community partnerships; and they will gain targeted, specific supports under an more effective response-to-intervention (RTI) system.

The implementation of a standards and proficiency-based educational system requires time and support. The pathway to achieving a new system of teaching and learning is a massive undertaking for any school or district. The complexities of such a shift are both philosophical and logistical. Over the past five years, the Noble High School community has worked diligently to ensure its readiness for awarding proficiency-based diplomas to the class of 2018. A summary of this work is as follows:

- **Development of Graduation Standards:** We studied standards including the Common Core State Standards for Math and English Language Arts, the Next Generation Science Standards, and the Maine Learning

Results; we have grouped these standards into clusters of skills, behaviors, and knowledge called NHS Graduation Standards;

- **Development of 21st Century Learning Expectations:** We generated 21st Century Learning Expectations divided into academic, social, and civic domains; we aligned NHS 21st Century Learning Expectations to Maine's Guiding Principles/Standards, and we produced an elaborate crosswalk that articulates this alignment;
- **Development of School-wide Rubrics:** We drafted, piloted, and implemented a system of school-wide, analytic rubrics to assess student proficiency in each of the NHS 21st Century Learning Expectations; we developed a crosswalk to ensure all students have a comparable and equitable opportunity for assessment;
- **Defined Levels of Proficiency:** We defined three levels of proficiency: distinguished, advanced, and basic. We delineated both quantitative and qualitative values for each level of proficiency;
- **Gradebooks, Report Cards, & Transcripts:** We rearranged our gradebooks to allow for student progress to be measured in terms of proficiencies within Graduation Standards;
- **Disaggregation of Work Habits:** We made a procedural and philosophical shift that supports students in developing strong work habits as well as content-based knowledge and skills. All teachers now assess students' work habits through the use of a school-wide, analytic rubric. Work habits are not averaged into the student's final grade and are reported separately on progress reports, report cards, and transcripts. A student's grade in the academic standards is a now true depiction of what he/she knows and can do;
- **Common Assessments:** We developed new common assessments that we review, validate, and score collaboratively to ensure alignment to 21st Century Learning Expectations and/or content area Graduation Standards (i.e., based upon CCSS, MLRs, NGSS);
- **Common Unit Frames:** We constructed common unit frames to identify the unit's alignment to Graduation Standards, 21st Century Learning Expectations, essential questions, formative/summative assessments, and key vocabulary;
- **Revised School Profile:** We updated our school profile, which now articulates our proficiency-based system;
- **Communication & Outreach:** The M.S.A.D. # 60 School Board has been regularly informed of all curricular and grading changes and has changed district policies to support this work and align with state statutes; all parents and students have been informed of the proficiency-based changes the school has made;
- **Supports & Interventions:** We revamped and increased the number of supports for teachers and students including: Response to Intervention (RTI), KnightTime (a new combination intervention and advisory program), academic support centers (Math Lab), standards recovery courses, professional development opportunities, best practices workshops/professional learning groups, and summer curriculum and literacy institutes.

Since beginning this work in 2014-2015, we have seen an increase in our graduation rate by an average of approximately six percent. Also, despite raising expectations, we have continued to see a decrease in the percentage of course failures across all grade levels.

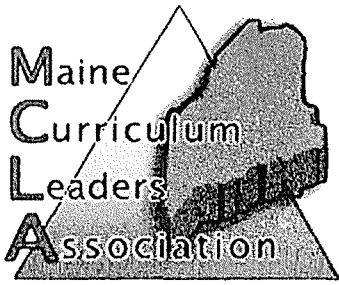
Leave the current proficiency-based diploma statute in place and allow educators in every district across our state to continue the important work of preparing our students for success after graduation. Educational reform requires vision, perseverance, and leadership. While LD 1416 may offer the comfort associated with the familiarity of previous educational strategies and constructs, this proposal would revert Maine schools back to an arbitrary system driven by non-academic factors that have minimal reflection of students' demonstration of the proficiencies necessary for college and career readiness.

Please oppose LD 1416 and allow Maine schools to continue to work of providing what is best for students.

Sincerely,



Alison Kearney  
Assistant Principal  
Director of Studies  
Noble High School  
[Alison.Kearney@msad60.org](mailto:Alison.Kearney@msad60.org)



MCLA's mission is to support curriculum leaders and champion curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies and practices that enhance learning.

*Julie Meltzer, AOS 91, President*

*Cathy McCue, Past President*

*Shelly Mogul, Auburn, Secretary*

*Gayla LaBreck, Associate Professor, Thomas College, Treasurer*

*Heidi McGinley, Executive Director, [director@mainecla.org](mailto:director@mainecla.org)*

**Testimony of Heidi McGinley, Executive Director, on behalf of the Maine Curriculum Leaders' Association Board of Directors, testifying against LD 1416 An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards**

The Maine Curriculum Leaders' Association (MCLA) incorporated as a 501 (c) (3) membership organization in 2008. Our members range from Fort Kent to Kittery and their work impacts about 130,000 Maine students. Our board of directors includes curriculum leaders from each of the state's nine regions. Our mission is to support curriculum leaders and to champion curriculum, instruction, and assessment policies and practices that enhance learning.

I am testifying on behalf of MCLA's board of directors in opposition to LD 1416. This bill further complicates the local diploma process and is already generating confusion and anxiety in districts. The bill may or may not repeal the 4722-A proficiency-based diploma requirements. If the intent is to retain proficiency, then the time-based requirements in the required subjects section are an unnecessary and irrelevant overlay, as is the rulemaking section. If the intent is to repeal 4722-A, then the required subjects section makes revision of the *Parameters of Essential Instruction* in any content areas, except those tested in the state assessment, irrelevant as well. We've testified several times that about 80% of our members do not want proficiency-based diplomas repealed and have documented the freedom and flexibility districts have had in managing their local proficiency-based diploma requirements.

The seemingly simple diploma requirements in the required subjects section raise a new set of implementation challenges and ethical concerns and prompt a number of practical questions about what high schools must do if it's enacted. How many new teachers will districts need to hire to add the additional time? Where will the certified life skills teachers come from? How will districts track a year's worth of structured physical activities outside the classroom for each student? What staff will be assigned to develop, assign, support, and supervise on-the-job learning experiences and internships? How will high schools in rural and small communities find enough placements for all students and enough vetted adults to make sure they're safe? How will students benefit from these experiences?

The rulemaking section of the bill concerns us for several reasons. First, most of the rules to be developed will apparently be legislated by this bill. We're not sure if their inclusion in this bill at this level of specificity means they cannot be revised or abandoned with stakeholder input in the formal APA process or if the APA process is rendered unnecessary by legislating agency rules in this way. We're concerned that this public hearing may be the only opportunity constituents and stakeholders have to inform the rule making process. Second, the rules legislate a specific structure for how schools must organize student learning. The pathways described in the rules are based on indicators designed for ESSA school accountability purposes, originating from *Redefining Ready*, a national organization. *Redefining Ready* does not organize their accountability indicators in discrete pathways; the pathways appear to come from the Maine Superintendents Association. I've attached MSA's pathways framework as it was presented to Maine's ESSA advisory group. MCLA's members evaluated this model in March and the board reviewed it again in preparing this testimony.

In March, MCLA members and high school principals from 23 districts generated a number of questions about what this pathways framework was intended to do and how it might impact high schools and students. They discussed its consistency with their own views of college and career readiness. There were several possible

interpretations of how it might work in practice. MCLA's board used the superintendent's visual to test those interpretations and to identify consequences. We think it's important to share some of our analysis today.

We started with Pathway D. Our first impression was that the indicators for Pathway D must represent the baseline diploma requirements for all students. That would mean the rules require schools to issue a basic diploma using the Pathway D requirements. Students could then get stickers or stamps or ribbons for any of the additional indicators they checked off. We thought the D level college placement exam and the passing score on that exam needed to be identified, but we could assume it would be the SAT, since it is Maine's high school assessment. If that is true, we could also assume that the SAT would become the high school exit exam and students who opt out can't earn a diploma.

But there is no college placement exam listed for pathways C and B, so our first interpretation that the basic diploma requirements were identified in Pathway D fell apart. Different diploma requirements for each pathway means districts would need to offer at least four differentiated diplomas. When the time requirements from the required subjects section of the bill are added to the GPA requirements for each pathway, we concluded that the only way to keep the graduation rate up is to track students. The best way to ensure students earn the required GPA's is to assign entering ninth graders to a pathway and provide courses in each pathway designed to get them to that GPA. It might be possible for students to move from pathway C to B or B to A, but there is really no incentive for them to do so. It isn't likely that lower track students will be able to escape their track and catch up to those in the higher levels, since they've had very different opportunities to learn.

The pathways emphasize the academic indicators and all but Pathway A require check-offs on two of the listed career indicators. There are a number of state and national business and education groups offering extensive lists of career readiness knowledge and skills. The only indicator listed that tells us anything about knowledge and skills is the industry credential, although we're not sure about ROTC, since so few Maine schools offer this. The others simply require a student to show up and spend some time showing up. That's a very minor indication of career readiness.

Our conclusion is that the pathways rules appear to legislate a student learning tracking system a lot like the one in my own high school, which I don't think was legislated even back then. That system was designed for a world that no longer exists. The rules are so specific about how student learning is to be structured and so prescriptive about diploma requirements that we're concerned they will expressly prohibit common local standards for all students. Must districts track students in these legislated pathways? Must they award four or five kinds of diplomas? Must they stop awarding proficiency-based diplomas because the indicators are the only approved requirements? Or must they find a way to overlay the pathways system onto the proficiency-based system they've been developing for a number of years? These questions will need to be clearly answered if you enact this bill with these rules.

Finally, we can't see how enacting this bill increases student learning in any way. Instead, it has the potential to foreclose college and career opportunities students need to build the life they want and deserve.

April 26, 2017

**RE: Opposition to LD 1416**

Dear Esteemed Maine Lawmakers:

I am writing this statement in **opposition to LD 1416, An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards**. The amendment of Title 20-A, section 4722 as described in the proposed amendment, LD 1416 would have a profoundly negative impact on Maine students and teachers. Please vote NO on this amendment.

The proposed LD 1416 would roll back years of hard work by Maine schools reverting Maine to an archaic system based on seat time and grade point averages instead of focusing on ensuring that all students meet the proficiencies necessary for college and career readiness.

States across the nation have embraced proficiency based teaching and learning because it is the right approach for students in preparing them for college and career readiness. Students who leave high school having demonstrated proficiency in rigorous standards will be ready to enter college without the need for remedial courses, will have the skills and knowledge they need to begin occupational or military training and will possess the skills they need for success in the changing, modern workplace. Having a common set of rigorous standards for all Maine High School students, and requiring the mastery of those standards legitimizes the value of a Maine high school diploma and supports consistency in expectations across all Maine high schools. In a proficiency- based system of teaching and learning the students are clear about what skills and knowledge they need to master and their progress toward those standards. The expectations are common for all students, while the time it takes to learn those things may vary. The system proposed in LD 1416 would revert Maine schools back to a capricious system driven by localized grading systems and seat time, that would result in a devalued diploma, disparate outcomes for students, and reinforced inequities across the state.

The system proposed in LD 1416 undermines the values of equity and consistency across Maine school districts. The four pathways described in this bill base eligibility for a High School diploma primarily on test scores and grade point averages. These are faulty measures for two significant reasons: first, the ACT and SAT are aptitude tests, they are not designed to measure proficiency of required standards; second, grade point average is completely incomparable from school to school and even classroom to classroom. For example, what it takes to earn an A in one teacher's class may only result in a C in a different teacher's class. Likewise, in one school district a 60% may result in a passing grade, whereas in a neighboring district it may take a 75% to earn a passing grade. Additionally, in a non-proficiency based system a teacher can roll behavioral factors into the overall grade resulting in an inflated or deflated grade that doesn't reflect a student's level of proficiency. All these variations impact grade point average, which is why it is a poor measure of

proficiency and should not be used for determining diploma status. It is important to note that colleges across the country recognize these issues and consequently, have begun to place less value on GPA and test scores in the admissions process. Additionally, including the academic or career indicators not tied to any proficiency standards would send a message of inequality and predetermination. For example, one career indicator allowed in this proposal is 90% attendance. That means that if you show up and do nothing you will be rewarded, regardless of whether or not any learning happened. This proposal sets the bar for Maine's students way too low. Determining diploma eligibility using the pathways described in this proposal would significantly devalue the Maine high school diploma.

Leave LD 1422 (Title 20A section 4722) in place as written and provide school and districts the time and support they need to do this important work well for the students of Maine. Educational reform requires vision and fortitude. While there may be comfort for some of our older citizens in reverting back to an educational approach that feels familiar, it is critical to Maine's future that we remember that we are preparing this generation for a future we can't yet imagine. They need an education system aimed brightly at the future not one that is stuck in the past.

Respectfully,

Heidi Early-Hersey  
Director of Teaching and Learning, MSAD 35/ MSAD 60

**MAINE STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
AND MEMBER, READYNATION**

*The voice of Maine business*

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE  
ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS**

**IN OPPOSITION TO LD 1416**

*An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards*

**Thursday, April 27, 2017**

**ROOM 202 CROSS STATE OFFICE BUILDING**

Chairman Langley, Chairman Kornfield, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Ben Gilman, Senior Government Affairs Specialist at the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. I am pleased to be with you today to rise and speak in opposition to LD 1416, *An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards*.

Over the last few years, this Committee has been hearing bills on proficiency-based learning, standards and aligned assessments and I appreciate your attention and thoughtfulness on these complex and intertwined issues. For those who have been on this committee the last few years, my testimony on behalf of Maine's business community is going to sound pretty familiar.

As I have said before to this Committee, and others, Maine's business community is incredibly invested in our state's PreK-12 public education system. Business is, after all, the number one consumer of our public education system.

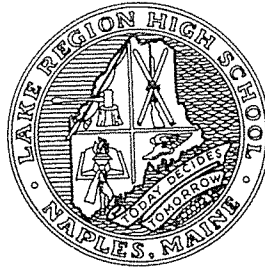
Our students, our teachers, and the entire system deserve our investment. We appreciate all the hard work our public schools and learning communities are doing to graduate students so that they are well-prepared for college and the workplace. Change is hard. We know that. But change is needed and the business community knows that there is more important work to be done to prepare today's students for tomorrow's workforce. To that end, we encourage this Committee to stay the course on recently enacted education reforms and reject any bills that will be before you this session attempting to repeal or weaken performance-based education reforms, meaningful standards and aligned assessments.

In recent years, modern ideas for learning based on proficiency have been adopted in several states, including Maine, and they are starting to work. As you know in a proficiency-based learning system students' instruction and assessments are aligned to make sure they have a mastery of a core subject before they proceed to the next level or receive a diploma. This system tells us so much more about what a student has learned. It is much more than a reflection of seat time in a class and rote memory skills. It is tougher and more rigorous than previous learning models. But it's also more engaging for students, and it gives us a better idea of our students' grasp of critical skills, and helps them develop critical thinking and problem solving. It can also help increase their verbal and written communications skills. All of these are skills employers are reporting increasingly missing in younger workers.

Producing better-rounded and more highly-skilled graduates will also keep businesses investing in our state, and potentially attract more businesses to Maine. When our students succeed, Maine businesses succeed, and our state's economy and competitiveness greatly benefits.

**A. Erik Good**  
Principal

**Guy Stickney, Jr.**  
Assistant Principal



**Paul G. True**  
Athletic/Activities Director

**Holly Barber**  
Guidance Department Head

April 27, 2017

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Services,

My name is Erik Good, and I am the Principal of Lake Region High School, serving the students and families of Bridgton, Casco, Naples, and Sebago. I am writing to you today in opposition to LD 1416, An Act to Amend High School Graduation Standards.

The work that we have done at Lake Region towards establishing a Proficiency Based Learning framework and diploma has had a tremendous positive impact on the quality of our educational program and on our student learning outcomes. Repealing this expectation would be a tremendous setback for the students of Lake Region.

Transforming our existing curriculum, teaching, and student engagement practices to meet standards in the proficiency model has crystallized our—and our students'—understanding of what it means to be truly college and career ready. We have developed greater specificity and honesty about the levels of knowledge, skills, and personal habits demanded by post-secondary work, and have toiled countless hours to create and refine opportunities for students to learn and be assessed at those levels. Rigor at Lake Region has changed from something ill-defined, ill-discussed, and ill-understood to the driving theme and goal in all of our conversations about teaching and learning. Our students no longer settle for a minimum level of effort sustained over a set number of hours or years, but strive to accumulate evidence of a collection of successful academic performances that prove to us—and to them—that they are ready for the next level.

We have communicated with students, with families, with colleges, and with the community to talk about the culture of proficiency we envision, and we have made tremendous strides towards creating a new understanding of what a high school diploma should mean. We have a long way to go, and countless more hours of work to do, but we believe this transformation to a proficiency based diploma is essential to the short and long term success of our students and our community. We must continue to establish, communicate, and hold students accountable for demonstrations of proficiency in standards across a range of content areas that serve as incontrovertible evidence of their learning. As our proficiency based diploma becomes a reality, we look forward to the day when we confidently graduate all Lake Region students knowing that they have proven their college and career readiness beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Thank you for your continued support of our efforts in this important task.

Sincerely,

A. Erik Good





## MAINE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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### TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 1416

### AN ACT TO AMEND HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA STANDARDS

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Elaine Tomaszewski, Acting Deputy Executive Director for Maine School Management Association, and am here to testify on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 1416.

School Boards and superintendents oppose this bill because we believe it is inappropriate to make wholesale changes to the graduation standards bill that was just passed last session after considerable debate and compromise. Such a move would send the message to students, parents and teachers that we are not serious about proficiency-based education and could lead to confusion and cynicism.

Not everyone, including some of our own members, like the law as it is, but changes should be made thoughtfully and based on experience in the field.

This bill essentially brings back credits hours as the criteria for earning a diploma and then mandates new curriculum. It also orders the Department of Education to do rulemaking around pathways and sets cuts scores for standardized tests and required grade-point averages. We recognize some of the language from "Redefining Ready" standards, but these are a work in progress right now.

It is also unclear how this proposal, which amends the credit-based requirements in §4722 and removes its repeal in 2020, and the new proficiency-based law, §4722-A, will work together.

We anticipate that experience in the field will inform legislation that makes practical changes to the proficiency-based law over time. We also support the concepts in "Redefining Ready" and anticipate they will eventually be incorporated into Maine's State Plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act.

What we do not support are significant changes in the graduation law in the first year. We owe it to our students and our staff to take the time to learn from their ongoing work and adjust the model where appropriate.

Executive Director  
Dale A. Douglass

Acting Deputy Executive Director  
Elaine M. Tomaszewski

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Testimony from Peter Geiger, 16 Brentwood Ave., Lewiston, Maine

**In Opposition to**

LD 1416 "An act to Amend High School Diploma Standards"

Thursday, April 27, 2017

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.

I am Peter Geiger from Lewiston, and I am testifying today against LD1416. I am not here on behalf of the State Board of Education or any other organization, but as someone who has been close to education reform since 1992, and an employer of size in this state. As a result of a crisis concerning public education in the US, the Maine Task Force on Learning Results was established. Through the course of 2 years and involvement of 10,000 citizens, it yielded Maine's rigorous Learning Results. It should be noted by the late '90s, we were touted as being among the states with the best education system.

What has happened in subsequent years is what I call the whip lash syndrome. There is a propensity to try to make dramatic swings in how we calculate funding for education, testing and diploma requirements. While I don't doubt the sincerity of those supporting LD1416, I would argue that a proficiency based diploma is a requirement for public education. The ability for a student to demonstrate mastery of content can only serve the graduate and future employers.

- As written, the bill undoes years of work by the Legislature, DOE, districts and educators. Essentially, it restates what a diploma means and does so by counting seat time.
- It undermines the work of those districts moving toward a PBL Diploma. This work has been difficult, but when implemented it gives the diploma value.
- LD1416 adds seat time for certain subjects and adds additional subjects (Physical Education, Career and Home Economics and Shop) which are not necessarily college or career appropriate. In my opinion the suggested pathways lack the rigor of a proficiency based diploma.
- The bill is general in tone and then delegates the work to the DOE.
- The specific requirement of 90% participation means a student could miss 17 days of school, and that is considered acceptable? It wouldn't be in my workplace.

A centerpiece to earlier work has been the Guiding Principles. They must relate to a diploma because they are essential to success in the workplace.

My concern is that this piece of legislation tries to take a broad swipe at education and loosely changes the game. If there are issues with the direction we are headed, then address the specifics, but let's continue to move the dial forward for the benefit of graduates and employers. They go hand in hand. And, let's not start over once again.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Pete Geiger  
16 Brentwood Ave.  
Lewiston, Maine

## Regional School Unit #2

Dresden – Farmingdale – Hallowell – Monmouth – Richmond

Bill Zima, Superintendent of Schools

7 Reed St., Hallowell, Maine 04347

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Committee, my name is Matthew Shea, and I am the Coordinator of Student Achievement for RSU2. I am testifying against LD 1478, which amends the high school diploma standards.

RSU2, representing Hallowell, Farmingdale, Monmouth, Richmond, and Dresden, and comprised of four elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools, has had a learner-centered, proficiency-based system since 2011. Among other things, the system allows learners to gather evidence towards proficiency on learning targets anytime, anywhere. Learners have a multitude of ways they can demonstrate that evidence, as long as it at the required taxonomy level for that target. No longer is it about the teacher telling kids to do something in only one way, kids repeating what they know, and moving on, everyone at the same pace. Our teachers have realized there is a major difference between compliance and engagement. These days, learners move through the learning continuum when they have gathered enough evidence to move on. It is not “on their own pace”, but when they are in their zone of proximal development. That means when the learner is ready to be challenged - not working on something they already know or something that is over their head. Learners are continuously and flexibly grouped to be in their zone of proximal development for any particular set of targets.

In addition, our schools are constantly coming up with new ways to conquer the “old ways” of school, including the limitations of seat time vs learning, credits vs proficiency, courses vs learning opportunities. We involve the community in these discussions, along with learners and teachers. We are constantly evolving the system to better meet the needs of the important people in the system - namely, the learners.

In the old credit-based system, students were placed into different tracks before they even reached high school, and it was very difficult to get out of those tracks, limiting kids’ opportunities before they had a chance to shine. In RSU2, our slogan is “cultivating hope in all learners”. We realized that in the older system, we were not doing that at all; in fact, we were crushing childrens’ hope early and often in too many cases. The proficiency-based work our district and many around the state has been working on for years is not something we are going to give up on; however, this bill will allow the districts and leadership that has not been working towards the proficiency-based system that is currently in law to continue to do nothing, as if the older system is working for all students.

We know the old system doesn’t work for all our young learners. In order for our children to reach their full potential, a transformation of the system is necessary, and the proficiency-based system that is current law is one step towards realizing that potential. Requiring more “credits” and very restrictive pathways as this bill is suggesting is a backwards step for our children, as it emphasizes the fact that there are scholars, there are average kids, and there are kids who can scrape by with a 2.0 GPA. That shouldn’t be acceptable if we are truly holding kids to high standards.

Then there are the kids who don't fit into any of these pathways. We had a student a couple of years ago that attended Richmond High School as a fifth year senior. This student had serious

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## Regional School Unit #2

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Bill Zima, Superintendent of Schools

7 Reed St., Hallowell, Maine 04347

attendance issues, drug problems, an abusive boyfriend, and was told by two high schools in the area she would not be allowed to enroll for a fifth year due to her being “so far behind”. In our proficiency-based system, since it’s not about seat time, it’s about learning, teachers at RHS devised a plan for her to meet targets in combination to “catch her up”, as it were. She still needed to meet proficiency on each and every target she needed before she graduated, so it was not about work completion, it was about learning. Even after missing a number of weeks in the middle of the school year due to a relapse, she provided evidence of learning when she returned, and eventually met her required targets a few days before graduation. She is now a sophomore at the University of Maine, majoring in biology with a plan to get her MD and PHD and become a medical researcher, and has been recognized by the Pittsburgh Bacteriophage Institute for her work as a freshman at UMaine. According to this bill, she would not have met her “credit” requirements nor any of the pathways enumerated here, thus not being allowed to graduate. Now she is a productive member of society, putting her past behind her. I shudder to think where she would be if not for Richmond High School and our proficiency-based school that allows learners to make their own pathway through the system.

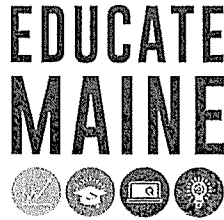
Paige's story on graduation day can be found here (<https://youtu.be/PMzXEwjIk8>).

Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

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The Joint Standing Committee On Education And Cultural Affairs  
Testimony from Ed Cervone, Executive Director, Educate Maine

**In Opposition To**

L.D. 1416 "An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards"

Thursday, April 27, 2017

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Ed Cervone, Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to L.D. 1416.

We oppose this bill namely because this committee took the last two years to gather feedback from the field regarding proficiency and the proficiency diploma and engaged in a thoughtful and thorough process to address those concerns and make changes to the law as needed. This was a conscientious, transparent, and public process informed by educators. This bill would discard that work and ignore the substantial public input gathered over that time.

Most importantly, we do not see this bill changing the underlying concerns we have for students. We don't see it creating greater equity or increasing opportunities for lower-income students. In fact, we believe that the changes offered in the bill might exacerbate their situation.

On average, half of all Pre-K to 12 students in Maine are eligible for free or reduced price lunch. This economic indicator is often unfortunately a predictor of educational success. Students from low-income households can find themselves behind their higher income peers and often remain behind throughout school. For every 100 students that enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade, approximately 31 will earn a two- or four-year degree. For students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, for every 100 students that enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade, approximately 14 will earn a college degree.

Calling for greater credit time and removing proficiency from the system doesn't improve these statistics. In fact, the extra credit time will further limit options for students to pursue different pathways where they have interest. This is not in keeping with a system that wants to promote deeper learning and that strives to empower students to take charge of their education and their future. It doesn't improve the prospects of those students who most need our attention.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to present this testimony.

Ed Cervone  
Executive Director



**READY  
NATION**

COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

MAINE

**TESTIMONY BY STEVEN M. POUND, PhD EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND  
MEMBER OF READYNATION, IN OPPOSITION TO  
LD 1416 "AN ACT TO AMEND HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA STANDARDS"  
THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2017  
1 p.m., Education and Cultural Affairs Committee Room 202**

Senator Langley, Rep. Kornfield, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Steve Pound, a former teacher, coach, principal, Faculty of Education university professor, superintendent of schools, Chair and member of the State Board of Education, former Associate Director of a Workforce Development for one of Maine's largest construction companies, and a member of the national business leaders organization ReadyNation. I have spent my entire career in the field of education and workforce development.

I offer this testimony in opposition to LD 1416.

Business leaders worry about the current and growing skills gap in our workforces and we support education initiatives that address these concerns.

Much good work is being done in our public education system, but some data is alarming -- 50% of our students entering the Community Colleges System need remedial classes, and 12% of UMS students need remedial classes. We clearly have a problem that must be addressed. We want every high school student to both graduate and to be college- and career-ready upon graduation.

A skills gap report ReadyNation published in 2015 shows that if we do not adapt and current trends continue, Maine will face a deficit of 15,000 high-skilled workers to fill the jobs of the future. We can ensure Maine's competitiveness as well as reduce Maine's skills gap by staying the course with the implementation of innovative education models like proficiency-based education.

Proficiency-based learning incorporates deeper learning – helping students master core academic content and at the same time, develop problem solving, effective communication, critical thinking and collaboration skills– the skills needed to produce and succeed in a competitive workforce. Students are taught how to apply the knowledge they have acquired in one subject area to use in different situations.

Proficiency-based learning is an important cornerstone to preparing Maine students. As we continue the debate about meaningful education reform, the conversation must include promising and evidence-based education approaches and college-and-career-readiness standards that develop and assess skills in our students that our businesses expect – and need – from their workforce preparedness.

As I read LD 1416, it appears to be an attempt to add more seat time to high school graduation requirements, which may not equate with our students gaining more knowledge or being better prepared for their post-secondary education and training. It also effectively eliminates proficiency diplomas which are scheduled to go into effect in 2020. And it adds a “college and career readiness” pathway, not proficiency, as the basis for whether a student earns a high school diploma and ultimately whether they are determined to be “ready” for post-secondary. Essentially, this proposal appears to keep in place the current diploma law, adds a few bells and whistles that sound good on paper, but moves us away from proficiency.

This turns back progress on forward motion toward an educational model that will better prepare students for the challenges of their future workplaces.

Our students deserve a better education than just sitting in a seat and marking time in class. They need to engage in their learning.

Employers need students who have skills and our higher education systems need students who have proficiency in skills to achieve at a high level. We need to make sure our students are employable, not just old enough to work. We owe it to our students to keep the bar high. I know if we challenge them, our teachers can get them there; and hopefully parents will realize the vital role they play in their children's future as well. Our teachers, administrators, students, parents and communities need strong evidence that we are working together and not dumbing down the education we are providing.

The future of Maine's economy depends upon the caliber of our workforce. Building the skills needed to be successful in the workforce of tomorrow starts in the classrooms today. We need to **stay the course**. I encourage the Committee to reject LD 1416 and continue on the proficiency-based education path so we can actualize its great promise for our students.



**Testimony of Becky Smith, Director of Government Relations  
American Heart Association/American Stroke Association  
In Opposition to portions of LD 1416  
An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards**

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Becky Smith and I am the Government Relations Director for the American Heart Association and American Stroke Association in Maine. The American Heart Association's goal is: By 2020, to improve the cardiovascular health of all Americans by 20 percent while reducing deaths from cardiovascular diseases and stroke by 20 percent. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in opposition to the physical education provisions in LD 1416. The American Heart Association believes strongly that PE is an integral part of the school curriculum and that any exemption from meeting Maine's proficiency standards in PE should be actively discouraged. It is also our reading of the legislation that this bill is drafted based on current and not future graduation requirements.

As I have said in this committee before, Physical Education is a core academic subject. It is much more than square dancing and dodgeball. PE teaches lifetime habits that our youth can carry into adulthood. Maine schools have some phenomenal PE programs, I would recommend that you visit a few of your local schools, in the off-session, in order to better understand today's PE.

Maine PE teachers are certified and trained to teach age-appropriate lessons. There is a science and knowledge base to how one teaches hand-eye coordination, what strength building and aerobic activities are appropriate at particular stages of development and how to motivate students to be physically active for a lifetime. All Maine students, regardless of their athletic ability in one sport should meet the same proficiency standards in PE, just as even the advanced readers have to be proficient in all areas of language arts, and those who excel in math must meet Maine's math standards.

Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the United States. Nearly 35% of children ages 2 to 19 are overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>. As these children grow older, they have a much greater risk than their healthy weight peers of developing and dying from chronic diseases in adulthood<sup>2</sup>. By 2030, over 50% will be obese if current trends continue<sup>1</sup>. We need to establish lifelong physical activity habits with

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/ahamah-public/@wcm/@sop/@smd/documents/downloadable/ucm\\_491265.pdf](https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/ahamah-public/@wcm/@sop/@smd/documents/downloadable/ucm_491265.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Saydah, Sharon, et al. Cardiometabolic Risk Factors Among US Adolescents and Young Adults and Risk of Early Mortality. *Pediatrics*:2013; 131.3: e679-e686

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Becky Smith

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strong physical education programs and regular physical activity opportunities throughout the day in our schools.

I am fortunate enough to attend, and help sponsor, the Maine Association of Health, PE, Rec. and Dance Annual Conference at the Samoset each November. What I see there are motivated, eager, education professionals (and current students) learning about advances in Physical Education. They are just as valuable as teachers of other subjects and should be respected as the professionals that they are. I have included the link to the conference materials here: <http://maineahperd.org/2016-mahperd-conference/>.

Now, I have to admit that before I started my career in public health advocacy 15 years ago, I also did not value PE as much as I should have. I was a “theater kid.” I did not appreciate my high school PE experience. However, much has changed since the mid-1980’s. I am now a complete convert. I played soccer then, but don’t now. In fact, I did not exercise much at all after high school until my late-30’s when I started paying attention to what I was learning from MAHPERD and the rest of the public health community. Now, I am trying to play catch up and it is not easy.

I hope my daughter’s life is full of the knowledge she learns in PE. She loves PE and espouses the messages she learns from Ms. Peck-Moad. I know that with good teachers, well-resourced programs, and a culture that values physical education, she will lead a healthy life.

I hope you too will show your appreciation for PE and remove the PE exemption from this legislation.

Thank you.



**JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS  
TESTIMONY REGARDING LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS BEING HEARD ON THIS DAY**

APRIL 27, 2017

*Respectfully submitted by:*

*Mark S. Kostin, Associate Director, Great Schools Partnership (Portland ME)  
Resident, Yarmouth, ME*

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Dr. Mark Kostin, and I am a resident of the town of Yarmouth. I also serve as the associate director of the Great Schools Partnership. As I believe you know, GSP is a Maine-based non-profit organization dedicated to improving learning for all Maine students regardless of where they might live, their race, their socioeconomic status, their primary language, their gender, or whether they have a disability.

I stand here before you today testifying against **LD 1416 – An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards.**

We are privileged to play a supporting role in approximately 100 high schools in 14 states, including 29 in Maine. As coordinators of the New England Secondary School Consortium – a partnership entering its ninth year involving the states of Maine, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont – we work closely with educators and community members to facilitate the sharing of information and resources that help inform local school improvement efforts aimed at personalizing learning for students.

The Consortium's data team recently released its fourth annual report and – among the very promising results outlined in it – high school graduation rates across our five states have risen from 80.4% in 2009 to 87.5% in 2015. Maine's rate mirrored this increase also moving from 80.4% to 87.5% during this time. The net effect of this improvement means that during this six-year period approximately 4,600 more Maine students received a high school diploma (than if the rate had remained unchanged).

Further, while we are graduating more students, the rates of enrollment in higher education have also increased during this time – from 60.4% for the class of 2011 in Maine to 61.7% for the class of 2015. And while more recent high school graduates are enrolling in college, the rates at which they are persisting (i.e., enrolling in a third consecutive semester) have actually slightly increased. This, combined with testimony heard before this Committee last week from Maine's Community

College and University Systems about decreases in remedial and developmental course enrollment, signals that Maine educators' efforts to support their students' achievement of clearer, more rigorous, college- and career-ready standards in a system that is increasingly proficiency-based and more personalized, is paying off.

Removing the proficiency-based graduation statute – as called for in this bill – will reverse these positive trends.

As I mentioned last week, there are several best practices that make-up a quality proficiency-based learning system. Some of these include:

- Being clear and transparent about all learning expectations;
- Developing common and shared criteria with colleagues and regularly calibrating their judgment of evidence of learning;
- Providing immediate, clear and actionable feedback to students;
- Ensuring students have the additional supports and time to meet expectations when they initially fall short– along with a grading system that doesn't disincentivize learning from mistakes nor unnecessarily penalizes students;
- Providing increased choices regarding how and where students might be able to demonstrate proficiency;
- Getting out of the way and co-designing opportunities for students to accelerate, expand, and enrich their learning when they are ready; and,
- Accurately and fairly reporting what students have actually learned and how well they have learned it.

The work of Maine educators during this decade has been remarkable. Districts and their communities have recognized that every student will need to be prepared for success after graduation regardless of what they might decide – or what we might assume they will do – once they receive their diploma. With Maine's proficiency-based diploma statute and the wisdom and capacity of educators across our state, we will continue to make our pledge for a promising future for young people a reality.

Please vote against LD 1416.

I am happy to further discuss our position, describe our concerns more, or answer any questions you might have at this time. I plan on attending the Work Session on this bill and would be delighted to be available to support the important work of this Committee should you so desire.

Thank you.



128<sup>th</sup> MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE  
2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0002

HEIDI H. SAMPSON  
HOUSE DISTRICT 21  
OFFICE: (207) 287-1440

LD 1416 An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards.

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and fellow members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Representative Heidi Sampson, serving the people of House District 21, Alfred, Newfield and parts of Shapleigh, Limerick and Parsonsfield. I provide for your consideration LD 1416 *An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards*.

I present this bill to you for the purpose of honestly examining and discussing where we are and where we are currently heading. Allow me to lay out my intentions with this bill.

1. It repeals the proficiency based diploma mandate. This would return the control of diploma requirements to the local level. If districts like what they are currently doing, they are free to continue. If districts prefer to embrace some other approach to education, they would be free to do so. In the hands of the local district is constitutionally where this responsibility needs to be. As our state constitution reads "...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 school"<sup>1</sup>
2. This legislation focuses on the four core academic content areas and increases the credits that are to be earned. Each of these courses can have a range of different content which can provide an increased flexibility for students. Math could include courses such as general math, business math, statistics, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, pre-calculus, calculus and financial literacy.
  - a. For example, if a student has a great interest in the sciences, they may want to swap out a credit from one content course in order to increase their science opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.maine.gov/legis/const/#a8>

- b. If a student is involved in a CTE program, they could have the flexibility to enroll in the 2 year program at the local center or region and receive credit for comparable courses such a math, science or social studies, respective examples could be building trades, Medical/Health Occupation or Criminal justice.
  - c. Currently, many students are being discouraged by guidance counselors to pursue CTE programs because they lack certain credits under the current Diploma requirements. This will only get worse as we increase to 8 content areas students will need to be proficient in. For many students, CTE is a lifeline to staying in school, for others it's a vehicle to pursue a passion and develop skills needed future careers. For all of these kids, they develop a practical skill set which can become a springboard for other areas of interest or a solid fallback position.
  - d. If we want students to be engaged, we need to give them options and flexibility.
3. Although 4 years for each of the core courses may be too much in the end, it's easier to amend these down, which I am willing to do. For the upper grades, these core courses can be adapted to allow a student to pursue a project based course, an internship, volunteering, etc. allowing them to explore more deeply an area of interest.
4. Physical Education is an area that needs some serious attention with some creativity to be applied. By no means is this to discourage PE teachers. However, in districts where there is little to no PE, providing other option for earning credit may be advisable. This session we have been discussing this recently at length and here's a means for incorporating it.
5. Career Studies can meet some of those real-world experiences needed for students to know how to properly handle themselves in the real world and help to give them a vision and to be more prepared. They can research possible jobs, interview, job shadow, intern, volunteer etc.
6. Life Skills, much like the Career Studies has real world application, yet both of these have been sadly lacking. Financial Literacy, nutrition, basic cooking, building, repairing or fixing things all are handy, useful life skills.

7. Finally, I've included four alternatives for earning a diploma. This is the same outline recently presented to the superintends association which was unanimously approved. The only change I made was to increase the minimum GPA in Pathway D to a 2.5 from the original 2.0. The academic indicators and career indicators provide a smorgasbord approach to earning a diploma based on a student's aspirations and life goals.

Let's consider all the bills we've seen this session requesting subjects be introduced or re-introduced into our schools. What we are currently doing has forced out many useful, beneficial and necessary topics such as Civics, Home Economics, Industrial Arts, Cultural Studies, Computer Science, Computer Coding, Financial Literacy, Physical Education/Activities and Bike Safety.

This bill can make these possible again.

We recently heard an impassioned presentation from a teacher in Jackman who stated, 'districts should be allowed to restore the broad-based education with teaching of History including US Government/Civics, Science, Art, PE, Career Studies, Financial Literacy and Life Skills to include aspects of home economics and industrial arts.'

A curriculum coordinator recently asked, "At what point do we deny a student a diploma?" Why not consider, "How can we create ways to grant a student a diploma?" How do we foster an environment where students can try a lot of things? They don't have to be forced to do everything. They need a broad base to springboard from, not a narrow one. They need to have a strong core, yet an even stronger one in the area of interest. We need teachers, not technology fostering student relationships. Teachers are the ones who will inspire and motivate students.

This will bill will let teachers teach and students learn.

Thank you for your consideration to this bill.



Heidi Sampson  
State Representative

*Proudly Serving House District 21:  
Alfred, Newfield, and parts of Shapleigh, Parsonsfield and Limerick*

## Deneen, Jayne

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**From:** Frank Thiboutot <fthiboutot@maine.rr.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 24, 2017 9:31 AM  
**To:** Langley, Brian; Ginzler, Phyllis; Kornfield, Tori; Pierce, Teresa; Daughtry, Matthea; McCrea, David; Farnsworth@legislature.maine.gov; Stewart, Trey; Millett, Rebecca; Turner, Beth; Fuller, Roger; Maker, Joyce; Deneen, Jayne; Sampson, Heidi  
**Subject:** Support for LD 1416

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Completed

RE: "An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards"

Dear Chairs Sen. Langley, Rep. Kornfield and Committee Members:

I can not attend the public hearing on April 27th but would like to offer some comments on this bill. As a former teacher who taught both overseas (Afghanistan & So. Korea) and in the U.S., I urge you to support LD 1416 for a variety of reasons.

"The most recent PISA results, from 2015, placed the U.S. an unimpressive 38th out of 71 countries in math and 24th in science. Among the 35 members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which sponsors the PISA initiative, the U.S. ranked 30th in math and 19th in science." And, it's certainly not from a lack of spending. -Source: Pew Research Center, Drew Desilver, 2/15/17.

According to the "Quality Counts 2016" report for all states, Maine received a C+. Why are we settling for mediocrity for our kids' futures?

With so many young people burying their faces in their i-Phones and computers, it's no surprise that their use of technology can't compete with or even come close to the classical education that our Founding Fathers received over two hundred years ago. I believe public education has gotten WAY off track with experimentation and social engineering. There is an obvious need to strengthen our students' knowledge of math, English, history and science not just their texting skills or their ability to access social media.

The "Required Subjects" and the "Rule Making" (Pathways) summary of this bill lead me to believe they will help make our students more competitive and successful in the direction they choose after high school. It will also enable teachers to actually teach rather than constantly be required to assess their students' progress.

Please vote "ought to pass" on LD 1416

Thank you for your consideration.

Frank Thiboutot  
Cumberland, ME  
(207) 239-5873 c.

Chairman Langley, Representative Kornfield, Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Emily Talmage and I am from Auburn, Maine.

In addition to teaching fourth grade in Lewiston, I write an education blog that has gained national recognition and led to invitations to speak at events across the state and country.

I am here to urge you to pass LD 1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards.

Since publishing my first blog post two years ago, in which I outlined my concerns with Maine's proficiency based diploma mandate, I have heard from parents and educators across the state who are equally alarmed by the changes taking place in their districts because of this law.

Many teachers are disturbed by the sudden micromanagement of their work in the classroom, and the requirements that they collect and enter endless amounts of data on each of their students. Parents, meanwhile, are concerned about the impact of new grading systems on their children's motivation and ability to be competitive in the college selection process with new, confusing transcripts; many are stunned by the amount of money their districts are spending on consultants, technology, and data systems in an attempt to comply with the proficiency based diploma mandate.

These concerns are not surprising, given that this mandate did not arise from parents and educators in the state of Maine, but rather from lobbying and consulting organizations funded by foundations with direct ties to technology, student loan, and financial companies that all stand to gain from this mandate.

Very few people know that Maine is in fact the only state in the union with a mandate of this sort, and that we are being watched and studied by national organizations that hope our schools will provide the "proof points" that they desire in order to further their agenda to remake our nation's schools.

Our children – including my two young children who will start school in only a few years – do not deserve to be used in this manner. Even if you believe that proficiency-based education is a good idea – and you will no doubt hear anecdotal evidence today in support of it - the fact remains that there remains no satisfactory research demonstrating that it is best practice. As long as we continue with this mandate, we admit our willingness to use Maine children as guinea pigs in a national experiment while local taxpayers foot the bill.

Please consider a repeal of this mandate and a return to local decision-making concerning graduation requirements, so that our districts can return to educating students in ethical, common sense ways.





**Statement by  
Penelope A. Morrell, State Director  
Concerned Women for America of Maine**

To Members of the Education and Cultural Services Committee  
Regarding L.D. #1416, "An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards"

April 27, 2017

Chairmen Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Services Committee, I'm Penny Morrell, State Director of Concerned Women for America (CWA) of Maine.

CWA of Maine supports L.D. #1416, An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards.

Concerned Women for America is the largest public policy women's organization in the nation and supports parents battling insidious federal overreach in education.

Because this bill allows local districts to determine the courses needed for a diploma and what is expected to earn a credit, we believe it takes a giant step forward in our education priority. Local control is needed in public education to meet the needs of individual localities and students, and a "one size fits all" approach to education isn't workable as we have observed since Common Core and Proficiency Based Education standards have been introduced.

We urge this committee to unanimously support L.D. #1416.

CONCERNED WOMEN FOR AMERICA  
OF MAINE

864 Manchester Rd., Belgrade, ME 04917  
Phone: (207)465-6015 Email: [director@maine.cwfa.org](mailto:director@maine.cwfa.org)

# LD #1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards - Ought to Pass

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Julie Edminster, and I am a resident of York, Maine. I urge you to pass LD 1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards. The Proficiency-based Diploma mandate has caused not only confusion to countless students, parents, teachers, and administrators around the state, but increases the local school budget costs significantly, negatively impacts student admissions to competitive colleges, and demotivates students to go beyond their potential. Outcomes-based Education failed in the 90's for the same reasons that districts are struggling with the Proficiency-based Diploma mandate today. Why are we mandating local districts go down the same path?

## **THE PROFICIENCY-BASED MANDATE IS CONFUSING**

Imagine being a 16 year old boy. You come back to school from a wonderful summer vacation and are ready to start the new school year. On the first day, the teachers start talking differently. They begin using new words and phrases that you don't understand. They start referring to school work as "formative assessment", "summative assessments", "general learner outcomes", "content standards", and "performance indicators". On the board, you see that that the standard that you need to learn today in Algebra II is "CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSA.SSE.A.1 *Interpret expressions that represent a quantity in terms of its context.*" How do you feel?

This is how students across that state are now being taught. It's confusing to kids. Teachers are using new vernacular and phraseology. The kids have to learn this new "policy speak" and for what reason? Parents now see lengthy report cards that they don't understand with terms they don't understand. Competitive colleges can't determine if a student is an exemplary student or an average student so they instead lean more heavily on SAT scores. It's perplexing and unnecessary.

## **THE FINANCIAL COST TO DISTRICTS IS HIGH**

Imagine watching a local Budget committee meeting and listening to a Superintendent beg for a third principal to be added to next year's school budget. Imagine that Superintendent explaining in a somewhat panicked voice that the new Proficiency-based Diploma mandate is taking up resources that the district does not have.

In the same breath, the Superintendent explains that the small district has had very high principal turnover in the past 3 years. Both a middle school principal and a highly respected

**LD #1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards - Ought to Pass**

Julie Edminster  
York, Maine

2

high school principal quit after a tumultuous year of trying to prepare teachers to meet the mandate.

This happened just last month in York, Maine. A third principal position at York High School is being presented to tax-payers at a cost of over \$100,000 per year for the sole purpose of implementing the PBD for a student body of 629.

Districts across the state are spending 10's of thousands of dollars to consultants from the only organization that are "experts" at implementing PBD - Great Schools Partnership (GSP). The same questions are coming up time and time again at meetings with GSP:

- How do we roll this out without impacting college admissions?
- How do we handle grading mixed classes that have freshmen juniors in the same class?
- How do we rewrite our assessments and assignments so they meet the mandate?
- How do we present grading and reporting to students and parents so they aren't confused?
- What's the best software application to keep track of assessments?
- How much should we budget for the transition?

None of these questions have been answered in a satisfactory way at any district without negatively impacting current students.

**CURRENT STUDENTS ARE ON THE BACK BURNER**

York implemented PBL at the Middle-school 3-years ago. Since then, the school has implemented two different software tracking systems and have made countless changes to the learning process. They moved from PowerSchool to MasteryConnect and back to PowerSchool.

My son was in the 8th grade during that first turbulent year. Teachers spent the majority of class time during the first few years of implementation re-writing tests, assignments so they fall in line with the new system, leaving students to learn on their own in front of their ipads all day.

The new system directly impacted my then 8th grader in a negative way. We had to send him to summer school to relearn an entire year of Algebra. His poor outcomes in 8th grade were directly related to the lack of deadlines and lack of teacher involvement in his learning. Now he is flourishing in Algebra II in High School and is a high honor student. He is motivated to learn again!

**Our. district. Is. not. Ready.**

### **COMPETITIVE COLLEGE ACCEPTANCE**

While York High School currently uses a traditional grading model, we are moving to the PBL model next year.

We visited 4 out-of-state competitive colleges this past week with my High School Junior. I paid close attention to the admissions requirements on our visits. Specifically, Syracuse University and Colgate University discussed the average GPA for accepted students as an A- and explained that the transcript is the most important piece in the college application. Larger colleges filter students automatically based on GPA and SAT scores.

Competitive colleges outside of Maine are not familiar with a Proficiency-based Diploma. This new transcript will directly impact students from Maine and their ability to be accepted to competitive colleges.

The local High School profile is very important and is significantly lacking in most Maine high schools. York may end up graduating it's current Freshmen and Sophomores with a mixed and this will absolutely negatively impact their chances to be accepted to competitive colleges outside of Maine.

The GPA for students graduating with a Proficiency-based Diploma will plummet for college bound students since "Habits of Work" are pulled out of the GPA. Other schools around the country include those work habits in the GPA. A student that may receive an A this year, will likely become a B student if habits are pulled out of the GPA.

In a PBL system, A's or 4s are considered beyond grade level. My experience shows that it is a lot of extra work for teachers to offer 4's as an option. In many cases, a student either meets the standard or doesn't so the highest grade the student can get- many times - is a 3. It is nearly impossible to end a quarter or year with a 4 in a PBG model.

College admissions do not know this. SAT scores will be weighted more heavily and do not represent the true ability of a student to be prepared for college.

### **PROFICIENCY GRADING IS DEMOTIVATING TO STUDENTS**

Students are allowed unlimited retakes to meet a standard. Eventually everyone eventually gets the same grade. There is no reward for students that understand the standard the first time. There is no motivation for a higher grade.

My son is now a Sophomore. He recently wrote a persuasive essay outlining " Why Standards-based Grading does not motivate students to excel." He wrote this paper relying on his own experience in his 8th grade year. He stated that the first year of PBG implementation was a wasted year for his own learning. This is coming from a now Honor level student.

## LD #1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards - Ought to Pass

Julie Edminster  
York, Maine

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### HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

It is very well known that Outcome-based Education (OBE), the former name of PBL, failed in the 90's largely because it was concluded that a high school education is "not skills based, but thought based".

In the 90's, it was "concluded that OBE had not prepared a generation for a competitive academic level." Below are some of the main reasons that OBE failed outlined in various studies, which are certainly relevant today:

- "It was "conceptually flawed" and "difficult to implement."
- It "weakened the idea of striving for success by eliminating the concept of failure."
- "Reduced the emphasis on subject and academic knowledge in preference to skills and process."
- "Being couched in education terminology that disempowers and alienates classroom teachers."
- OBE became a "treadmill for teachers to complete administrative tasks and documentation that absorbed hours, even in the poorest schools."
- "This acknowledgment (that OBE failed) today comes too late for the thousands of students who suffered as a result of the implementation of OBE, as well as for those teachers who had unnecessary and unfair pressure placed on them by the system."
- "To pay an army of OBE education consultants, schools divert vast resources into retraining teachers to use a program of no proven effectiveness."
- "Opponents are accused of being Neanderthals who oppose education reform."

### CONCLUSION

I urge you to return diploma requirements, teaching, and learning methods to the local districts. This top-down mandate is costing districts time and money and is hurting those that matter the most - our students.

Sincerely,

Julie Edminster  
5 Forestview Drive  
York, Maine  
207-651-5191

**LD #1416 - An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards - Ought to Pass**

Julie Edminster  
York, Maine

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CITATIONS

"Contribute." *Independence Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Apr. 2017.

Ma. Cecilia Ycong, Faculty at Far Eastern University Follow. "Issues in Outcomes Based Education." *LinkedIn SlideShare*. N.p., 16 Jan. 2014. Web. 21 Apr. 2017.

**Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:**

**As the mother of three children, I urge you to support LD1416, An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards.**

There is no doubt that the ideal student should be a productive, involved citizen and lifelong learner after graduation. Who wouldn't want this for everyone? However, schools are now mandated to certify that **all** graduates are:

- **clear and effective communicators**
- **self-directed and lifelong learners**
- **creative and practical problem solvers**
- **responsible and involved citizens**
- **integrative and informed thinkers**

Certification of academic skills is more easily measured. The "Guiding Principles" are considered "soft skills" and are difficult to certify, since they are so subjective. For example, it's easier to determine if a student is proficient in Algebra I, than being an "integrative and informed" thinker.

Shouldn't major shifts in education normally be piloted on a smaller scale? How is it possible that this became a mandate without being piloted? Why not just mandate this for Charter Schools and then let them pilot it for a few years?

Another "red flag" is that the money behind this legislation hasn't been disclosed. Most money leads back to the Nellie Mae Foundation. They funded the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education, which is now Educate Maine, to lobby for this mandate. They also funded the consultant group Great Schools Partnership, whose work is dependent on this legislation. They have grown to almost 40 employees! They gave grants to the Maine Department of Education to communicate about proficiency-based diplomas. They even funded the education reporting on MPBN. Can anyone on the committee tell me who funds the Nellie Mae Foundation? Don't you think that parents have a right to know?

Another concern is that few districts have "clearly or effectively" communicated their plan to meet this mandate and outlined the new graduation requirements. In talking with many parents of middle school students from many different districts (RSU 1, Brunswick, Yarmouth, York, etc.), most have received little or no information. In my district, 8<sup>th</sup> graders have already registered for their 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes, but the new graduation requirements aren't yet available. They are still in draft form and haven't been approved by the policy committee. After inquiring, I was able to learn that incoming freshman will create "Body of Evidence" Portfolio with 15 examples of proficiency in the "Guiding Principles." Our Guidance Counselors will work with students to ensure that they are maintaining their portfolio. We have 3 counselors for about 600 students, so that's 200 portfolios per counselor.

My children get more "Habits of Work" grades than academic subject grades, and they haven't implemented the "Guiding Principle" portfolio requirement. It's not clear if these portfolios will be approved by a panel of teachers and if there is an appeal process if the student is not considered proficient in these principles. Nothing has gone before our Board yet. There have been no public forums or Q & A sessions for stakeholders.

I urge you to support LD 1416 and am available via email if you have any questions.

Thank you!

Beth Schultz, Woolwich, Maine; [Schultz5maine@gmail.com](mailto:Schultz5maine@gmail.com); 207.442.9667

**Statement by James Isgro, resident of Sidney, Maine, in opposition to LD 1416, “An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards” – April 27, 2017.**

I am here today in support of LD 1416. I think this is a good bill and the perfect time to send the message to school districts that you have faith in their administrations, staffs and elected representatives to provide the best education for their students. If districts do not wish to use a Proficiency Based model, let them compete with schools that do.

My own district is an example. We were one of the first districts to implement “Mass Customized Learning” and we were an original member of that Maine cohort. After years of school and community disruption and millions of dollars spent, we have learned that all was not necessary nor in the best interest of our children.

Please vote LD 1416, ought to pass.





TO: Senator Brian Langley  
Representative Tori Kornfield  
Chairs, Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs

FROM: Rosa Redonnett, University of Maine System Chief Student Affairs Officer

DATE: April 27, 2017

RE: Written testimony neither for nor against LD 1416, *An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards*

I am sorry that scheduling conflicts prevent the University of Maine System from participating in today's public hearing but we wanted to offer written testimony neither for nor against LD 1416, *An Act to Amend High School Diploma Standards*.

Given the large number of students who matriculate to one of our seven campuses from a Maine high school and require remediation in mathematics or English language arts as well as the state's workforce projections that anticipate by 2025 we will need 158,000 more workers with a postsecondary degree or credential than exist today, the University supports the continuation of high standards in our preK-12 schools that better ensure the college and career readiness of graduates.

We thank Representative Sampson and LD 1416's cosponsors for their consideration of ways to further improve the preparation of Maine students. As written, we have several questions about the bill, largely generated from our admissions officers. While understanding the bill proposes multiple pathways to graduation, the use of cut scores on either the ACT or SAT in one of those pathways is potentially problematic, as it privileges strong test takers who may not necessarily know how to apply the material as opposed to the critical thinkers that higher education and employers are increasingly demanding. It could also serve as a barrier for students, as the cut scores as proposed are actually higher than we generally look to see as part of a student's more comprehensive application package to several of our campuses, including USM. We also wonder what the options are for students who achieve less than a 2.5 GPA. GPA is one of the many pieces of a student's application package we consider, and we do in fact accept students with a range of GPAs, including those lower than 2.5.

The expectation that all students would take four years of mathematics and science may be unreasonable as some smaller high schools lack the number of teachers or students to deliver four years of instruction in those areas and an increasing number of high school juniors and seniors are taking early college courses in those subjects rather than further high school level coursework. Admission to many programs within the University of Maine System does not require four years of math and only requires two to three units of science. We additionally question the absence of foreign language as a requirement for graduation as high school coursework in foreign language is generally a requirement or strong recommendation at most of our campuses and many campuses nationally. We continue to caution against any actions that could limit a student's ability – now or later in their life – to pursue higher education and the opportunities a degree or credential can offer.

For the Committee's background, we currently define our general admissions academic preparation expectations for all seven of our campuses as follows:

*High school coursework should be at the college preparation level or higher. Advanced, honors or*

*AP coursework is encouraged. Candidates should have four units of English, three to four units of mathematics (at least algebra I and II, and geometry; some programs require advanced mathematics), two to three units of a lab science (some programs require specific science courses), two units of foreign language and two to three units of social studies. Computer science and fine arts courses are strongly recommended. Transfer students may use completed college coursework to replace missing required high school courses.*

Finally, I would offer that a challenge for both faculty and students in our teacher preparation programs is the increasingly frequency Maine seems to move – or even discuss moving – the goalposts when it comes to preK-12 learning and graduation standards. This makes it difficult for us to prepare quality educators, and we hear from our students that it discourages them from pursuing a profession that poses so much unpredictability at this time.

If this Committee in fact determines that the graduation standards need to be revisited to ensure rigor, relevance and alignment with the expectations of higher education and employers – including through a rulemaking process as proposed in this bill – the University of Maine System requests that we be provided a formal opportunity to participate in that review, along with our colleagues at the Maine Community College System as well as K-12 and business and industry representatives.

I hope this information is helpful as you consider LD 1416. Please do not hesitate to reach out if I can provide any additional information prior to the work session about the University of Maine System's college readiness expectations.

State of Maine  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Rachelle Tome, Chief Academic Officer of the Department of Education

Neither For Nor Against: L.D. 1416

An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Sampson

Cosponsored by: Senator Woodsome and Representatives Espling, Gerrish, Malaby, Sanderson, and Sirocki

Date: April 27, 2017

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Rachelle Tome, and I am here today representing the Department neither for nor against L.D. 1416, An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards.

This bill proposes to amend the requirements for a high school diploma by repealing the sunset and application provisions of the high school diploma standards in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 4722. It also requires that rules be developed establishing pathways to demonstrate achievement of high school diploma standards by documentation of college readiness assessment standardized test scores, combinations of GPA and academic and career indicators and advanced placement examinations and course grades.

The development of the proficiency based diploma began in 2011 and represents the input of Mainers from across the state. Title 20-A, §4722, 2-A. passed by the legislature in 2011 and most recently updated in 2016, following passage of L.D. 1627, An Act To Implement Certain Recommendations of the Maine Proficiency Education Council, currently provides opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of the standards through multiple pathways. Achievement may be demonstrated by evidence documented by course and learning experiences using multiple measures, such as, but not limited to, examinations, quizzes, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects.

The Department and school districts across the state are currently involved with the implementation of MRSA, Title 20-A, §4722-A. The timeline for implementing the proposed changes is not clear, and the Department is concerned that changing graduation requirements at this time not only creates fiscal challenges, but negates the work that has taken place over the past few years; creating disruptions for students, schools and districts.

For these reasons, the Department of Education is speaking neither for nor against L.D. 1416, An Act To Amend High School Diploma Standards. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have, and I will be available for work sessions on this bill.