

Development of Distance-Learning Plan

The coronavirus pandemic upended classroom instruction in school districts and revealed both positives and shortcomings in our ability to do distance learning. What was implemented by necessity should now be improved by design. Distance learning will never replace the role of in-person learning. It will become an integral part of providing equitable learning opportunities for all Maine students regardless of their location. An action plan is needed that addresses professional development for teachers; assessment of devices; high-quality connectivity in all parts of the state; development of online curriculum appropriate to age groups; and intentional use of online learning to enhance curriculum and expand learning opportunities for all students. Distance learning can supplement in-person instruction and also support subject areas where there is a teacher shortage. That coupled with increased broadband access is key to educational equity for Maine students. Funding for distance learning needs to be identified and ultimately should be part of the Essential Programs and Service funding formula. Communication to parents and the public about the potential and appropriate role of distance learning in education to meet the needs of all students is essential to making this plan work.

Equity in Education

All students, regardless of their race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry, national origin or disability deserve equitable opportunities and support to learn in Maine's public schools.

Maine School leaders have the responsibility to create learning communities that recognize and value diversity. MSSA advocates for equitable access for all students to the highest level of quality public education. All district leaders must facilitate continued self-examination of practices and policies recognizing bias and stereotyping; and adopt guidance and take actions that ensure that student's success will not be predicted nor predetermined by either real or perceived identities.

Broadband Access for All

Inherent in our responsibility to assure equity in education and viable distance-learning plans is the need for reliable broadband in all parts of Maine. This has been a long-standing goal of state policymakers and school leaders, but we need to underscore its urgency and be part of a collaborative, statewide effort to make it a reality in Maine. Reliable broadband not only would support distance learning and sharing of educational resources, but it would also allow the state to attract the types of businesses that would bring young people and families to Maine and help create and grow jobs. Broadband for all requires a significant financial commitment from government and the private sector – estimated at more than \$500 million -- but that investment is essential to our future prosperity.

Student Count for 2020-2021

Because of the unique and historic disruption caused by Covid-19, we recommend the DOE stabilize our educational environment by maintaining level funding to schools by providing a hold-harmless consideration for units that have seen a significant reduction in student counts. The Department of Education should look at the 2019 October count and the 2020 October count and base subsidy for the new school year on the higher of the two. That would assure stable funding to support necessary safety measures and staffing levels.

