

1-2014

Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System in Maine: Phase II - District Level Analysis

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Silvernail, D.L., Stump, E.K., McCafferty, A.S., & Hawes, K.M. (2014). Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System in Maine: Phase II - District Level Analysis. Portland, ME: University of Southern Maine, Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation.

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**Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System
in Maine:
Phase II - District Level Analysis**



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January 2014



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Center for Education Policy, Applied
Research, and Evaluation

Published by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute in the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research, and Evaluation (CEPARE) in the School of Education and Human Development, University of Southern Maine.

CEPARE provides assistance to school districts, agencies, organizations, and university faculty by conducting research, evaluation, and policy studies.

In addition, CEPARE co-directs the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI), an institute jointly funded by the Maine State Legislature and the University of Maine System. This institute was established to conduct studies on Maine education policy and the Maine public education system for the Maine Legislature.

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This study was funded by the Maine State Legislature, and the University of Maine System.

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Executive Summary

Implementation of a proficiency-Based diploma System in Maine: Phase II- District Analysis

This report describes the findings from Phase II of a study of Maine's implementation of a proficiency-based diploma system. At the request of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the Maine Legislature, the Maine Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) has conducted a two-phased study of the implementation of Maine law *LD 1422: An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy*. Phase I of the study in 2012-2013 reported on the preliminary development, costs and impacts of standards-based school programs in Maine. Phase II of the study focused on examining school districts in Maine implementing a proficiency-based diploma system.

Eight Maine school districts, representing different school district sizes, geographic areas, and years of implementing proficiency-based reforms were examined through site visits, interviews, and focus groups. Implementing a proficiency-based diploma system by 2018 represents a sea change in the way education is provided for Maine children. The evidence from both phases of this study indicated that many school districts are working diligently to fulfill the state mandate. In so doing school districts are seeing some key benefits from this work. At the same time, school districts are facing some key challenges in completing this work.

Each of these key benefits and challenges are described in the report, along with a series of recommendations to facilitate future work in implementing Maine's proficiency-based diploma system.

Implementation of a proficiency-Based diploma System in Maine: Phase II- District Analysis

Maine Education Policy
Research Institute

University of Southern
Maine

Introduction

This report describes the findings from Phase II of a study of Maine's implementation of a proficiency-based diploma system. At the request of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the Maine Legislature, the Maine Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) conducted Phase I of this study in 2012-2013 reporting on the preliminary development, costs and impacts of standards-based school programs developed to implement the Maine law *LD 1422: An Act to Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy*. In 2013-2014, Phase II of this study was conducted, focusing on school districts in Maine implementing a proficiency-based diploma system. This report presents a brief summary of Phase I of this study followed by a description of the study and findings of Phase II and policy recommendations.

Context

In 2012, the Maine Legislature passed into law LD1422, *An Act To Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy*. (See Appendix A.) The cornerstone of the law was the requirement that Maine transition to a standards-based educational system in which graduation from a Maine high school would be based on students demonstrating proficiency in core content areas. The system was to include standards in the eight content areas of the state learning standards and guiding principles as well as multiple types of assessments and ways for students to demonstrate proficiency. In addition, the Maine Department of Education was charged with assisting school districts in their transitions by developing proficiency-based system tools and by providing technical assistance to school districts.

In supporting passage of this law, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the legislature requested that the Maine Education Policy Research Institute

(MEPRI) undertake a two-phased study designed to compile data on the development, costs, and impacts of proficiency-based programs in schools and school districts, and to report back to the committee on the progress Maine schools and school districts were making in transitioning to the new education system. MEPRI is a nonpartisan research institute funded jointly by the Maine State Legislature and the University of Maine System, with a mandate to collect and analyze education information and perform targeted education research for the Legislature.

Phase I: Preliminary Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System in Maine (A School Level Analysis)

Phase I of the study consisted of collecting case study data from a sample of nine public schools in Maine. This analysis revealed that the schools were using a variety of strategies as they began to make their transition to a proficiency-based diploma system. The data also revealed varying levels of progress in developing the different components of the system.

It was clear from schools in this study that Maine educators and leaders were working diligently to embrace and implement the core elements of LD 1422, including the development of a standards-based education system and a proficiency-based diploma program. The initial work of this reform appeared to require significant understanding of the need for change in a school if it did not already have strong student engagement and a positive school climate. Building this type of educational environment required "paradigm shifts" around beliefs about student learning, teacher role, collaboration, and even the structure of many traditional elements of American public schooling.

Once beyond the initial stages of changing belief structures, moral imperatives and school culture, the logistics of rolling out a curriculum with "student choice" and "multiple pathways" was proving very complex and difficult within existing structures of traditional public school teacher certifications, student achievement reporting, school grade configurations, daily scheduling, existing learning management technology, limited external or community supplemental resources, and current levels of personnel capacity. More detailed discussions of

these findings appear in the Phase I report, *Preliminary Implementation of Maine's Proficiency-Based Diploma Program*. This report is available at www.usm.maine.edu/cepare

Phase II: Implementation of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System in Maine (A District Level Analysis)

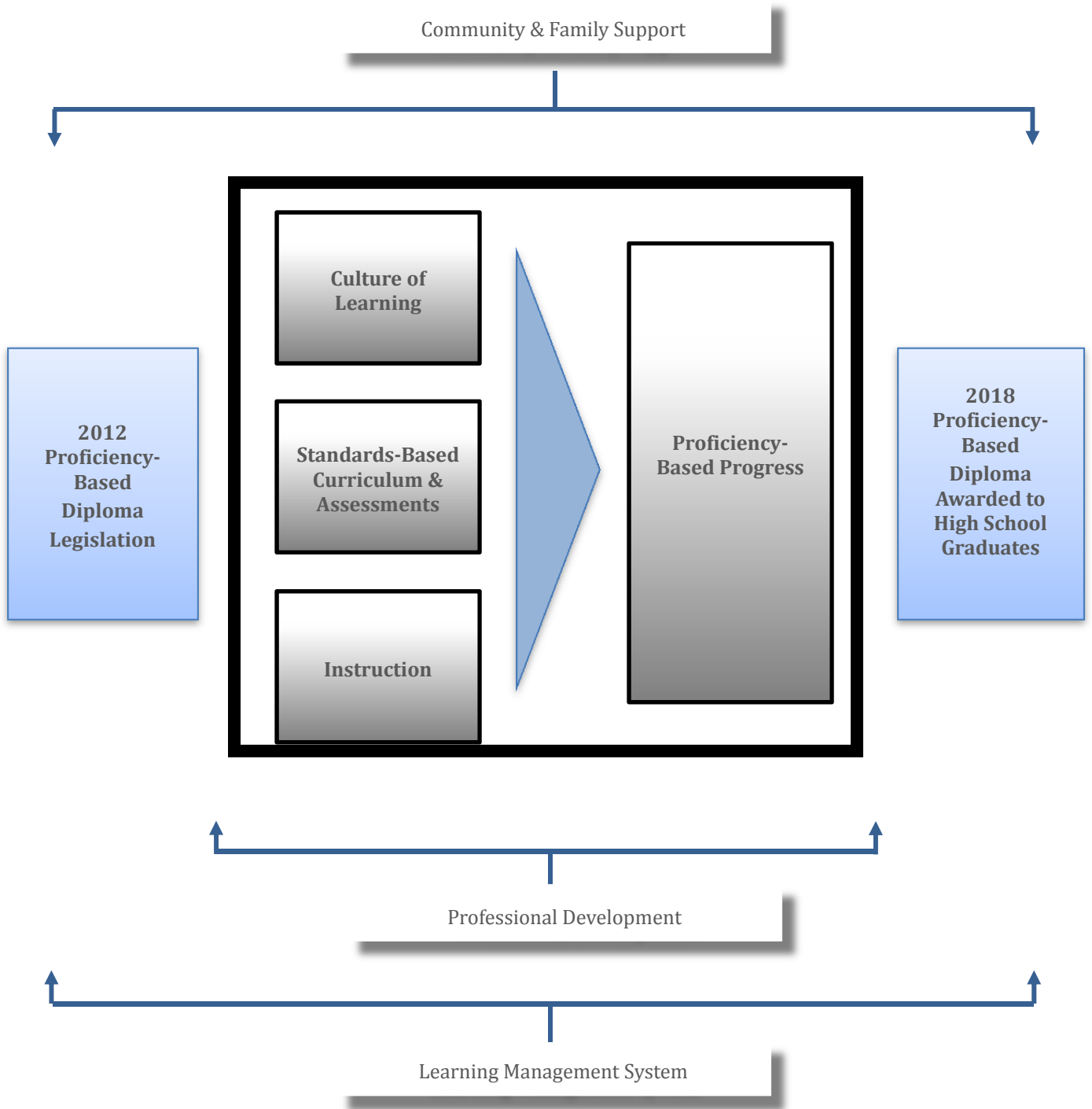
After sharing the findings and recommendations of Phase I of this study in spring 2013, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs of the Maine Legislature requested MEPRI to conduct a second phase of this study. Phase II further explored key elements that had been raised in the initial analysis. It was also evident that implementing a proficiency-based diploma system required changes and deliberate work at the district level as well as at individual school levels. Therefore, Phase II of this study focused on gathering data from participants in various district-level roles as well as discussing district-level benefits, challenges and work done with teachers and administrators in the various schools of each case study district.

Study Methodology

Conceptual Model

After extensively searching the literature, the MEPRI research team discovered that, while there are many conceptual pieces describing what a standards-based or proficiency-based education system should look like, there are few conceptual models describing the components of this type of system. Furthermore, there is very little empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these systems. Consequently, there is virtually no empirical research to guide the development and implementation of standards-based or proficiency-based systems, which has resulted in schools having little historical information and no clear evidence to guide them in developing the new diploma systems. In the absence of existing evidence or models, the MEPRI research team developed a heuristic working model based on conceptual literature and the evidence from Phase I of this study. This Working Conceptual Model of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System can be seen in Figure 1 on the next page.

Figure 1: Working Conceptual Model of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System



Sample Selection

Several methodological steps were taken in designing and executing Phase II of this study. First, a sample of school districts was selected for inclusion in the study. Since all Maine school districts must make the transition to the new system by 2018, many school districts across the state have begun the process, but limited resources precluded a study of all these school districts. Thus, a sample of districts was selected based on five primary criteria:

1. Representative of different size school districts, in terms of student enrollment and geographic area;
2. Representative of school districts with various histories of student academic performance;
3. Representative of school districts with rates of students eligible for free or reduced lunch lower than the Maine state average and higher than the state average;
4. Representative of school districts that were just beginning implementation and those who had been implementing proficiency-based reforms for longer periods of time; and
5. Agreed to participate in the case studies by providing the MEPRI research team access for site visits, interviews, and by providing appropriate documents.

Once an initial list of districts was identified that met criteria 1-4, school district superintendents were contacted. Each administrator was provided an overview of the study and asked for their participation in the study. A second list of alternative districts was identified in case a district in the initial sample chose not to participate. All but one of the districts in the initial sample agreed to participate in the study. The district that declined expressed support of the study but said their staff and students had been too overwhelmed with visitors, observers and researchers in the recent months. An alternative district was identified and agreed to participate. The districts that have participated in the study, along with some basic demographics of each district, appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Case Study School Districts				
<i>District Name</i>	<i>2013 Free/Reduced Lunch Rate</i>	<i>2013 Enroll ment</i>	<i>District Office Location</i>	<i>Length of Reforms</i>
Auburn School Department	52	3664	Auburn, ME	3 years
Gorham School Department	24	2693	Gorham, ME	0 years
RSU 2	41	2220	Hallowell, ME	5 years
RSU 3	58	1480	Unity, ME	3 years
RSU 4	45	1440	Wales, ME	2 years
RSU 16	37	1750	Poland, ME	15 years
RSU 57	41	3275	Waterboro, ME	2 years
Maine School District	25*	2000*	Central Maine	1 year

* Denotes approximate numbers to maintain requested anonymity.

During the steps of identifying and selecting schools and school districts for each phase of the study, an important clarification was made with the districts that chose to participate in the study. *This study was not intended to evaluate the school districts, district or school staffs, or the progress they were making in developing proficiency-based diploma programs. It was intended to document their work and identify any obstacles they were encountering during their development process.* Evaluation of these reform efforts and the outcomes achieved should not occur until sometime in the future. Thus, readers are encouraged to keep this in mind as they review the various study findings.

Case Studies

Once the sample was established and case studies were identified, a protocol was developed to guide data collection and the school district visits by the research teams. Using the protocol MEPRI research teams had used in phase I of this study as a template, the research team in this study worked with each district to customize site visit procedures. Typically, these

protocols included interviews, focus group meetings, and the review of key documents. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with district administrators, school administrators, high school guidance counselors, PK-12 teachers, technology personnel, school board members, local business leaders, local teachers' association representatives and parents. In addition, interviews were conducted with college admissions officers and a lawyer with expertise in Maine school law in order to address some questions in relevant areas that were raised by school district participants. In total during Phase II of the study, the research team conducted 82 interviews and focus groups as well as 8 one-day case study site visits.

Study Findings

As reflected in the literature review and data analysis in Phase I of this study, analysis of the case study data in Phase II confirmed again that these Maine school districts were using a variety of approaches, methods and definitions in their implementation of a proficiency-based diploma system as required in LD 1422. The case study districts in this study were also at various stages of implementation, ranging from a district that was still in the planning stages and a district that had been engaged in this work for over 14 years. The school districts also varied in district-level rates of free and reduced lunch (range: 24% - 58%) as well as total enrollment (range: 1,440 - 3,664 students). However, a common theme clear in every district in this study was that the **educators and educational leaders involved in this work were thinking deeply about ways to embrace this reform in a manner that benefitted every student**. There was a great deal of hard work being done in schools and school districts to understand the needs of students, develop a plan to implement this legislative policy with fidelity, and work collaboratively with all stakeholders to improve the educational experiences of Maine's children.

All participants in this study expressed both benefits of this work as well as the struggles and challenges to building a proficiency-based diploma system. This findings section of the report will highlight some of the most prevalent benefits of the work to implement a proficiency-based system as seen in the case study districts and the most commonly mentioned

hurdles and needs experienced during implementation raised by interview participants.

Benefits

Although many district leaders indicated that the legislation was their main impetus for developing a proficiency-based diploma system by 2018, all participants in this study said there were important benefits to the work being done in their districts. Below is a summarized list of the benefits raised by participants in this study, followed by a more in-depth description of each benefit.

- ❖ *Improved student engagement.*
- ❖ *Continued development of robust intervention systems for struggling students.*
- ❖ *Collaborative professional work to develop common standards, align curriculum, and create assessments.*
- ❖ *Collective and transparent monitoring of student progress and needs by educators, administrators and families.*

Improved Student Engagement

Many parents and teachers believed that having **transparent expectations and standards engaged students more thoroughly in their education**. A school administrator said, "Kids can tell me what they are working on. They are engaged." One principal described their work as "crafting a roadmap with student input." A middle school administrator said, "Students have more tools in their toolbox to talk meta-cognitively about their learning." A parent said, "[A proficiency-based system] motivates kids. Kids know what's expected of them, and they know that when they get it, they can move on. I was surprised by how much drive and motivation my own children have in this new system." An administrator said, "[Students] are empowered to take that next step in their learning."

Robust Intervention Systems

Another positive result of this increased awareness of student progress and proficiency was cited as the **continued development of robust intervention practices and opportunities**.

School leaders and educators at all grade levels were monitoring student progress and identifying students who were not meeting standards. This practice was reportedly happening much more quickly and directly than in the past. One principal indicated that the key to a strong proficiency-based system was “a really good intervention process--summer, vacations, or after school--long term intervention plans.” A superintendent applauded the district's work to provide professional collaboration to “determine what the student needs are and who can best meet them.” Many schools had built intervention times of 30-90 minutes per day or focused intervention courses for students identified as needing more support to meet standards.

Collaborative Professional Development

All school districts in this study shared the belief that developing a “seamless” system, which included a PK-12 curriculum aligned to content standards and common assessments of students proficiency levels, was a critical component and a strength of a proficiency-based diploma system. **Many educators, administrators and parents in all districts said that the greater emphasis on collaboration among teachers was a definite benefit of this work.** A principal said, “Professionals are being more open to working together.” A special education director said that one success of their district's changes was the “heightened level of collaboration between regular education teachers and special education teachers.” A superintendent said, “One positive outgrowth of the work is a collaborative culture. Peer observations are now happening. Before it was like silos, but now people are more willing to share best practices...”

Educators in these case study districts were working diligently to develop PK-12 curriculum and to understand the content and developmental goals of grade levels above and below them. An elementary level teacher said, “The elementary school has been standards based for many years. It would be ideal if we could be trailblazers for [our district].” A parent agreed, “Elementary school is ready for the change. Teachers are already used to being open and communicating regularly with parents.” Therefore, it was suggested by some participants that

the existing models provided by the elementary level could be adapted to the specific developmental stages throughout PK-12.

These efforts to develop PK-12 collaboration were a welcome change in many districts. A school administrator in a district that had been implementing these reforms for about three years said, "We're past closed door policies." A high school teacher indicated that a positive aspect of the changes was greater "vertical teaming with middle school teachers." Many teachers underscored that it was critical to know the expectations that had been held of students prior to their class in order to understand the student's knowledge base and learning gaps. Educators also shared that having a clear awareness of the standards or expectations their students would be held to in future years was essential in making sure they were prepared for those next steps. As one high school principal said, "There needs to be backwards planning to say what end result is wanted."

Educators in districts that had been implementing proficiency-based education for at least four years emphasized that this increased collective work should not mean a loss of individual areas of expertise or interest. In the first few years of implementation, teachers lamented, "Teaching to the target, over the last couple of years, has taken away from the creativity and the guiding principles." But it appeared that as educators began to settle into their locally developed proficiency-based education system after a few years of implementation, they rediscovered the importance of their own classroom instruction. A high school principal said, "Don't lose the creativity and the art of instruction. There is still a balanced model of instruction that is necessary and critical." Finding this balance between the individual and collaboration was clearly hard work and required on-going professional training, but understanding its importance was evident in most districts engaged in developing a proficiency-based diploma system.

Collective Monitoring of Student Progress

A frequently cited strength of a proficiency-based education system was the potential for educators, parents and students to all be involved in monitoring the individual student's progress towards meeting academic standards and educational goals. An elementary school principal said, "Students can see pathway and know where they're headed." A high school teacher said, "Proficiency-based [system] changes the way we talk about grades and how students are doing. It gives focus to those discussions." A superintendent said, "Proficiency-based diploma legislation has helped create conversation at the [local school] board level, support, awareness, and policy work."

District leaders indicated that **deliberate plans for being transparent with parents and families during the adoption and implementation of these changes** to a proficiency-based system were critical to the success of the reform. A parent said, "The transparency is a tool for clear advocacy. [It] empowered me to say, 'No, wait a minute,' when my child was struggling." A high school guidance counselor also described a successful proficiency-based system as "transparent for everyone who looks at it, including parents, students and school staff." This transparent system also allowed parents and educators to "know where [a student] is behind now and have intervention programs for her." A parent said, "I see specifically what my child is learning and find the gaps. For example, my child was struggling then I looked at the curriculum and noticed that he had skipped [some important concepts]. So, I told his teacher, and he went back to filling those gaps."

Challenges

Participants in Phase II of the study also identified many challenges they are encountering as they work toward implementing a proficiency-based diploma system. Below is a summarized list of the challenges raised by participants in this study, followed by a more in-depth description of each challenge.

- ❖ ***Developing clear, common definitions of key system components.***

- ❖ *Local implementation practices consistent with intentions of legislative policy.*
- ❖ *Building parent understanding and support for new practices.*
- ❖ *Creating job-embedded, sustained professional time for collaboration.*
- ❖ *Understanding the unique needs and approaches of various grade spans or developmental levels, especially the stages of early childhood, the high school level and the population of students with identified special education needs.*
- ❖ *Developing comprehensive, sustainable learning management systems.*
- ❖ *Finding resources to assist with predicted cost increases.*
- ❖ *Preparing students for post-secondary systems, specifically college and career readiness.*

Clear, Common Definitions

A concern for most participants in this study, including parents, was having clear, common definitions of key elements of proficiency-based education within their individual district. A middle school administrator said, "It is all talking the same language." Case study districts that had been implementing for at least a few years did appear to have established common vocabulary and definitions of key terms and concepts within their district, even if those definitions varied from the ones provided by the Maine Department of Education. Many educators agreed that it was important to invest significant time in "dialogue and decision-making process" to establish a common language among professionals. A school principal said, "We haven't figured out yet how students progress. We've had to tell our staff that we don't have answers for you." Some districts found that it was helpful to have engaged in a deliberate process to create a strong vision and foundation of understanding among staff prior to rolling out their significant changes to parents and community members. One parent said, "I have to give the teaching staff some professional respect. They need to come to agreement on what proficiency means."

Local Implementation of Legislative Policy

Implementation with fidelity--consistent, common practices and definitions--is a concern with almost every education reform. The task educators and practitioners face is translating education policy into practice. This appears to be very true in the sample schools.

A study by Hill (2001) illustrates the type of translation problem facing Maine school districts. In a study of a school district working to develop local standards from a state-level standards-based document similar to the Common Core. Hill concluded, "Local interpretations of state policy figure centrally in standards-based reform efforts" (Hill, 2001, p. 290). "One teacher's understanding of the word 'test' (as an end-of-unit [mathematical] assessment) diverged from the meaning intended by the reformers, for whom 'test' also includes instructional activities involving reasoning and proof. Other teachers did not dispute her reading, and reformers' attempt to convey a new aspect of instruction was lost" (Hill, 2001, p. 301).

Although many proficiency-based or standards-based reforms are inspired by a call for consistent competencies from all graduates, local interpretations of standards and high stakes consequences of not meeting standards can undermine that desired outcome. A high school principal in this study of proficiency-based diploma systems in Maine said, "We know there are a number of kids who won't meet the bar. That is why our district's standards are lower."

Another example of a translation problem uncovered in the school districts was a lack of consistency in the definition of key features in developing and implementing proficiency-based diploma systems. Most case study school districts that had been implementing a proficiency-based system for three or more years had actually developed policies that aligned more with reformers' definitions of a "standards-referenced" system: "...standards are used to guide curriculum and measure student progress. In a standards-referenced system, students generally advance in age-based cohorts (grade levels) and may advance without demonstration of proficiency on specific standards" (Maine Department of Education, 2014). A leading advocate for standards-based practices, Robert Marzano, said, "Standards-based means you don't move

onto the next level until you demonstrate mastery at this level. I don't move on to sixth grade mathematics until I've demonstrated all the topics in fifth grade mathematics" (Dodson, 2010). However, most participants in this study defined their practices as including "standards-based progress," but students still move through grade levels and classes in a traditional manner based on time or earned credits, regardless of proficiency levels. And, students not meeting standards or not demonstrating proficiency were identified for interventions or additional supports after they had moved on.

Support and Understanding from Parents

Despite efforts to communicate that this process of developing common local language and expectations can "be a lot longer than maybe they think," many parents expressed confusion along the way. A teacher said, "A challenge is conveying this method to parents when teachers even are asking what it means." Although many districts and schools "hold informational forums" on a regular basis, administrators expressed frustration that these outreach attempts were usually "poorly attended." Even when they do attend, parents still shared uncertainty about their understanding of a proficiency-based system. One parent said, "Parents struggle because it's not how it was done when we were kids. There are lots of words used in the system that were not used in our daily lives. This can cause fear." Another parent said, "I've seen the report card change basically every year since [my daughter] was in kindergarten. It really started to become confusing when she was in 4th grade when they started defining learning targets...I'm so used to the ABCD. I wish they would go back to that." A parent of an elementary student said, "Moving levels so much with new teachers is different. When I have a question, who do I call? Who do I talk to?" A high school principal identified a critical component of a successful change: "Educating parents and making it not scary."

Time for Professional Collaboration

Since collaboration and collective work appeared to be so critical and beneficial to developing a proficiency-based diploma system and meeting the needs of all students,

professionals were loud and clear about the need for more compensated time to do this type of work. Teachers and school administrators indicated that "writing curriculum together," having common early release or late arrival time, and "freeing up other professional development time for collaborative work" were steps in the right direction but "more time is still needed." It was evident that especially in the initial years of aligning curriculum and developing common assessments, significant collaborative time was needed. A special education administrator said, "We need more time to do it right and more professional development around how to do it right. We need more professional guidance." Since many of the districts in this study were rural or encompassed a relatively large geographic area, a hurdle for common professional time within the school day was geographic distance. Teachers in the same school had often found ways to collaborate within their school day. But systemic structures had not been developed in most of the case study districts to "have real time with our colleagues to figure this [system] out" across the district.

Various Grade & Developmental Level Approaches

A challenge raised throughout this study of Maine districts working to implement a proficiency-based diploma system was the importance of recognizing the distinctions among the different learning stages within a PK-12 educational system. One administrator said, "There has to be differences between elementary school and high school implementation of a proficiency based system." Another elementary school principal agreed, "High school should look different from elementary and middle school for kids."

There are numerous theories exploring the various stages of human development. Steiner (1919) started the Waldorf schools based on three stages of child development. Piaget (1936) introduced four distinct intellectual stages from birth to the mid teens. Skinner (1938) outlined a series of phases scientific organisms undertake as their behavior matures in relationship to their environment. Many other models have been developed over time, but while the exact age of certain stages may vary by individual child or theoretical model, it is

commonly understood that these distinct stages exist and understanding them helps educators better address the needs of students.

The school districts in this phase of the study were grappling with the issue of varying grade and developmental levels. There appeared to be an especially important focus in the very early grades of schooling that differed from other grade levels and often varied from the philosophies of some reform models. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers who the research team interviewed in this study indicated that community building was a much more critical focus of their classes than personalization or customized learning plans for each student. A kindergarten teacher said, "Differentiated learning is important, but you have to build community first, especially in kindergarten. Some children have never gone to school before. It's all so new. They need to learn how to be part of the community before they learn content standards." Another elementary teacher said, "The concern at lower elementary level is so much community-based and social learning. We need to create that network for kids. We are concerned about social, emotional, and behavioral learning: building a sense of community." A district administrator said, "It has been clear in kindergarten through second grade level that we need to have that [teacher] presence and constant routine."

Almost every participant in this study agreed that high school was also a critical and distinctive learning experience. "Right now," said a high school administrator, "the high school takes the most tension between proficiency and graduation rate."

"High school is just different."

"The high school is unique."

"High schools are strange animals... It's a lot more complicated and the stakes are higher."

Teachers, parents, community members and administrators all said that many of the proposed reforms for changing grading, schedules, and student progress would be very difficult to implement at the high school level. "It's different at high school level, because there are real

outcomes such as diplomas, transcripts, etc." Some very real barriers to changing traditional practices were raised. A teacher said, "Parents are much more worried about GPAs because they were concerned about scholarships."

This concern about graduation was heightened when discussing special education.

Recent discussions by some of the study districts with the Maine Department of Education had clarified that a diploma must only be awarded to students demonstrating proficiency in all eight content areas. Several special education administrators and teachers raised worries about what this meant for some of the students in their special education programs. One special education director said, "There is a population of kids with really prevalent learning problems. However, they are not intellectually disabled so will not receive direct adult supports from the state. They are reading and [doing] math at a functional level and really, really struggling with basic skills. The goal for us is to help them find work that will fulfill their dreams. Teaching them how to be employable, balance a checking account, and read the newspaper...Right now, they get a diploma. But what they will get in the future, I am unsure." Another special education administrator said, "We are closing the doors on some opportunities for kids."

Learning Management Systems

One of the key challenges school districts face is the development and/or identification of a learning management system that will support and facilitate a proficiency-based diploma system. And while many of these individuals described specific components of a valuable learning management system to gather data and monitor performance, they emphasized the importance of first having a comprehensive vision and support structure developed. One district technology coordinator said, "Technology should be an organic extension of proficiency-based work, not just a tracking device. It should be a natural part of the feedback loop." A clear purpose for changes and common definitions for critical elements of the system were fundamental prerequisites expressed by many technology personnel: "The lack of clarity on

what this is going to look like is a barrier...You cannot ask the technology pieces to fall into place before you have consistent needs.”

Many technology leaders urged administration at all levels to involve technology experts in the early stages of systems development in order to use resources in the most efficient and effective manner: "It is important to develop your needs and goals and then find the technology that fits those, not the other way around. You need to welcome the technology people to the table early, not after." Another technology leader said, "Leadership teams need to have a technology background and vision. It's important to look out one year, three years, five years at a time of where the district is going to have efficient and compatible technology." This idea of sustainability and a long-term vision is supported in existing literature about systems thinking as well: "Most advocates of systems thinking agree that much of the art of systems thinking involves the ability to represent and assess dynamic complexity (e.g., behavior that arises from the interaction of a system's agents over time)" (Sweeney & Sterman, 2000, p. 249).

Then based on the specific vision, analysis and development of the proficiency-based diploma *system*, certain aspects of technology can be critical to efficient implementation. Although, many educators and district leaders stressed that this must be one comprehensive system, not just add-ons to a current system. One administrator said, "The challenge is that other things don't go away. There is always more and more information. New systems are often another new system on top of an already rickety system." Another district leader indicated, "There must be a commitment for a span of time to one set of standards and methods" to develop a sustainable new system instead of "tinkering at the edges of an existing system."

There were various programs in use by the districts in this study: Infinite Campus, Educate, JumpRope, PowerSchool, STAR, and Easy Grade Pro. Most districts had multiple platforms in use to conform to the state reporting requirements and provide standards-based grade reports. There were mixed responses to every system. Although, districts with technology personnel who had sophisticated programming expertise were generally satisfied with the "more mature products" of Infinite Campus and PowerSchool. These programs are supported by

the MDOE and have "an automatic sync with the Maine Department of Education system." They could also be re-programmed on the back-end to produce custom standards-based grade reports. However, one district administrator said, "We don't have a person to manage that complexity of data K-12--person with programming skills. We would have to buy or subcontract that." So, districts without such personnel expertise could purchase plug-ins to customize Infinite Campus from companies such as Customize Computer Specialists, but these were additional costs. Other districts without such internal expertise had invested in web-based platforms such as Educate ("best option out there for standards-based grading;" "not a mature product, a moving target") and JumpRope (a self-described "bootstrap startup;" "good standards-aligned reports;" "too expensive"). However, these systems do not integrate with the MDOE state-level reporting system so do not replace Infinite Campus or PowerSchool. Most district leaders had comments similar to one technology coordinator, "Nothing has all the pieces yet."

"We need to manage information much more efficiently because it is what's gotten in the way of initiatives in the past," said a superintendent. This need was evident in all of our case study districts, but as discussed earlier, technology is not necessarily the direct answer to this felt need. A technology director said, "This still requires time and training...The capacity to change the report card is already there technically. The capacity to accept change may not be there." Another technology coordinator said, "The need does exist but it's whether it's going to work with all the [users]." Thus, the evidence from the school districts reinforced the critical need for districts to understand the larger context of a proficiency-based diploma *system* and see technology and the learning management products as tools to provide support once a vision and structure have been established.

Resources needed for Predicted Costs

As well as some of the concerns of educational or human costs mentioned above, direct fiscal costs of some aspects involved in a proficiency-based diploma system were daunting for school districts in this study. As previously mentioned, additional time for professional

collaboration was a key component in building a proficiency-based diploma PK-12 system. Educators, teachers' association representatives and administrators all expressed that "a challenge is time for adults to collaborate that is compensated." Many participants indicated that they would be open to alternative scheduling, differentiated professional development or modifying employment contracts as long as "work is compensated fairly." As one teacher said, "We need more money dedicated to professional development--but not professional development where we go away to hear a speaker or bring a speaker here--but time in our own districts with our own people getting curriculum aligned and high-quality common assessments developed. And those doing all of that work need to be paid as the professionals that they are."

Resources for providing more time were also a fiscal concern when discussing how students would progress through a proficiency-based system. Some reform approaches encouraged allowing students to progress at their own pace of learning (Sturgis, Patrick & Pittenger, 2011). However, this practice had implications for a public school system that has traditionally provided funding for thirteen years of education for the vast majority of its student population. A Maine lawyer with a specialty in school law explained that allowing more time for students to graduate was legally permissible, "School must be provided to age 20 and adult education after 20. So, if the proficiency-based system provided the student to get their diploma through adult education system beyond the age of 20 or extend the age eligible of secondary school, that would be legal." However, a superintendent indicated that if they allowed students to progress at their own pace, "Kids will be here longer. I'm not sure we have the taxpayer support to fund that." A representative of the teachers' association said, "We would need substantially more resources and money." A Maine lawyer agreed that there may be additional costs, "Due process hearings against schools will increase...We will see some increase among non-disabled students who failed to meet the standards asking compensatory education for special education services that they did not receive...It is more likely that more families will bring out legal claims when the child ages out and has not earned a diploma, saying that they haven't been properly served. These are expensive cases for both school districts and the families involved."

Preparing Students for Post-Secondary - College Readiness

The research team found that many high schools in this study had maintained traditional grading practices or developed dual reporting systems: "Parents are still highly concerned that the information is available if the colleges need it." One high school guidance counselor said, "I really worry. There are mixed messages from colleges; it depends upon who you talk to at the colleges. Those people saying it's okay must not be admissions folks, because when we met recently with a college admissions panel, they acted perplexed about how to interpret standards-based transcripts. We were told that you needed to have a key on your transcript and if that transcript itself was not clear cut and concise, students would be at jeopardy."

Guidance counselors, high school teachers, administrators and parents raised similar concerns in all of our case studies. Therefore, the research team interviewed an admissions counselor and admissions director at two selective, four-year colleges. It is important to note that all colleges and universities have unique practices and policies regarding admissions, so these comments cannot speak for every post-secondary institution. Other organizations have gathered comments from various colleges and universities that should also be taken into consideration as well. However, very little published information appeared to include direct responses from highly competitive four-year colleges, so that was the focus of inquiry in this study.

All college admissions folks agreed that they received thousands of application from around the world reflecting various high school experiences, including home schooling and alternative education programs. However, **there were clearly some elements of the college application that were vital in allowing admissions personnel to distinguish qualified students for acceptance.** It was pointed out that it is important to remember that each application must be clearly understood and easily compared to other applicants in a short amount of time. For example, at one institution 11,000 applications were received. These were reviewed by the fifteen admissions officers in about a three-month period. Then, approximately 2,200 applicants were offered acceptance. College admissions personnel indicated, "A school needs to do a good

job in its [school] profile of explaining what the academic program is. We are selecting students that have chosen the most selective path through the curriculum...By a good job, I mean understanding the grading system and GPA scale is important. There are lots of different approaches that can work, but [the transcript] must distinguish course levels and rigor of courses." When asked what was helpful on a transcript, a college admissions director replied, "Course selection is critical, but work habits grades would be very unhelpful because on the common application the teacher recommendation has a space to capture work ethic...GPA is helpful. We need a system that makes it clear who has taken the harder courses." When asked about standards-based or proficiency-based transcripts, a college admissions director said, "Achieving proficiency means very little because of various definitions of proficiency. College admissions want to understand what sort of high school classroom have the students been in. A standards diploma does not mean it's not a good transcript, but I'm not sure a standards diploma is going to help us know more or less."

These conversations with case study high school personnel and college admissions counselors indicated that the expectations of colleges and universities needed to be understood clearly. Several high schools in this study appeared to be addressing these issues with dual reporting methods that integrated both standards-based grading at the local level and traditional information needed from colleges.

Preparing Students for Post-Secondary - Career Readiness

A clear goal of many school districts in this study was "trying to prepare [students] for what happens when they go to college or work." Our case study site visits therefore included interviews with civic and business leaders as well. Many of these discussions with local professionals revealed a general support for improving their community's educational system and highlighted the importance of providing students with the skills to be college and career ready. A local community leader said, "K-12 education should include a whole different level of community: significant civic engagement, research, opportunities for internships...and prepare

students for jobs." A business owner said, "Businesses want high school graduates to have a mastery of the English language, the ability to communicate...keep a budget...be adaptable." Specific trade skills or expertise were very important in some fields. One business administrator said, "We want welders. It is great to be a creative thinker and life-long learner, too, but I need workers who know how to weld." Conversations with vocational educators and alternative education teachers in the case study districts in this study made it evident that these "multiple pathways" offered in many high schools must also be included in the core systemic changes implemented when changing to a proficiency-based diploma system. However, the data gathered in this study regarding this area was limited. The importance of understanding career readiness, vocational training and alternative pathways are critical components of developing a comprehensive PK-12 proficiency-based diploma system and would warrant further study.

Systems change is an intricate, comprehensive process that requires investment and diligence at many levels. Implementing a Proficiency-Based Diploma System throughout a school district must include an understanding of the numerous components of that district and how they interact with each other.

In summary, while many participants in this study identified clear benefits to developing a proficiency-based diploma system, participants identified many key challenges. Implementing such a system is raising many critical questions: *How do we help students who are not meeting the standards? How do we help engage and support the families of students who are not meeting the standards? What should all children know and be able to do at certain developmental stages and by high school graduation? How can we improve the educational system to better meet the needs of all students? Where do we find the time to engage in all of these important steps of improving Maine's public schools?* These are difficult questions that do not have quick or easy answers.

Overarching Challenges

As the research team reflected upon the various benefits and challenges school districts are facing in implementing the proficiency-based diploma system, two overarching challenges have become apparent. These were the need for a systems approach in the work and the need for greater guidance in translating policy into practice.

Systems Approach

While Phase I of this study analyzed the work of *schools* engaging in proficiency-based education, this second phase of the study focuses on the efforts of school *districts* to make systemic changes among all of their schools, with their school boards and among their community. Seeing the common themes within the benefits and challenges mentioned in the sections above highlights the importance of seeing this reform as a systems change. The Working Conceptual Model of a Proficiency-Based Diploma System illustrates the interconnectedness of every component in the system that is critical to its comprehensive success as an improvement in the educational experiences of every student. As previously quoted from the report of Phase I of this study, "Attending to making significant changes in all the components in the system is paramount for creating a sea change like the new one proposed in LD 1422."

Therefore, it is important to frame these specific points within the fundamental need expressed by many educators and administrators for a working **system**. One administrator said, "Staff needs to be really clear about how it works into the whole system." In this quote, the "it" is describing a student's grade, but there were similar comments with regard to many other components of the educational system: teacher evaluation, curriculum standards, assessments, instructional practices, behavioral expectations, definitions of student progress, students' developmental stages, post-secondary requirements, etc. As one principal said, "We are working on how to report out, how to teach, and how to work within our system." Another administrator said, "There has to be a strategic way to build this into a proficiency-based

system."

There is a great deal of study and existing literature that analyzes distinct working systems and proposes models for engaging in successful systems thinking. While some of these theories are developed with business or corporate systems in mind, many of the aspects of systems thinking are applicable to education. **A key element of systems thinking is shifting from the isolation of each characteristic of a system to consideration of all characteristics as they relate to each other.** As the administrator quoted above said, "...how it works into the whole system." One leading voice in systems thinking from an education perspective is Richmond. Richmond (1993) expressed the importance of examining and developing systems with the understanding that each factor or characteristic connects to and affects the other characteristics in a continuous loop:

The shift from one-way to circular causality, and from independent factors to interdependent relations, is a profound one. In effect, it is a shift from viewing the world as a set of static, stimulus-response relations to viewing it as an ongoing, interdependent, self-sustaining, dynamic process. It will also cause students to think in a very different way about what is going on in the world around them (p. 118).

Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that exist in a Proficiency-Based Diploma System, but equally important to understand their relationship to each other and recognize that each will change as the system is built and matures or as students progress through the various grade spans or developmental stages.

Translating Policy into Practice

Second, as described above school districts are experiencing some major challenges in translating state policy into local practice. For example, in the absence of clear guidance from the state, each school districts is left to define and develop their own system, which in turn results in standards being defined differently, proficiency differently, and student progress differently. As a consequence, there is and will be very little common about the Common Core and the proficiency-based diploma systems across the state. Local school district and community are important but many participants interviewed in this study expressed concern

and discomfort with these inconsistencies. Local autonomy and the realities of what was best for students in practice were important, but as a curriculum coordinator said, "We would like more guidance. Local control is the state's answer for every question and is a cause of frustration for practitioners." Balancing government oversight and local expertise is a difficult balance. In an interesting example of a government establishing its role in the education system, the Dutch government introduced "the state steering at a distance" approach in 1985. The state established that its role in overseeing the higher education system was to be more of a "catalyst and coordinator...to enhance autonomy and accountability" (Leisyter, Enders, & deBoer, 2009, p. 118). It appeared that this method of providing guidance, coordination, accountability and autonomy could be welcomed by Maine districts working to implement a proficiency-based diploma system. A superintendent said, "We need exemplars and models...delivery models that make sense." A special education director said, "Augusta can help by helping to provide resources; we need lots of professional development on assessments and cognitive complexity to make this paradigm shift."

An example of this desire for further guidance from the state was that many participants raised a significant concern about the timing and opportunity for support from the state level. As indicated by Jan Breton, Director of Special Education at the Maine Department of Education, "Up through December 30, 2017, a student can graduate based on the accumulation of credits. But, that graduating class of 2018 has to be graduated by the demonstration of standards. The tricky part is that the switch just doesn't go on on January 1, 2018. Those students have to be moving through a standards-based system in order to demonstrate that by the time they graduate in 2018" (Braff & Breton, 2013). A district's plan for its Proficiency-Based Diploma System is not due for approval until 2018, but it must demonstrate that a 2018 high school graduate has had four years in that system. One education leader said, "I feel that we have been set up for failure...starting out in the middle of the game will not show success. Students entering 9th grade next fall [2014] will be all coming in at different levels and have not 'grown up' in a proficiency-based system; yet, we will be expected to have them all show

proficiency on the standards in order to graduate. That's huge." Many district leaders indicated that further guidance and support for developing a proficiency-based education system needed to be provided before 2018.

Summary

Implementing a proficiency-based diploma system by 2018 represents a sea change in the way education is provided for Maine children. The evidence from both phases of this study indicated that many school districts are working diligently to fulfill the state mandate. In so doing school districts are seeing some key benefits from this work. At the same time, school districts are facing some key challenges in completing this work. As one education leader said, "It is a lot of hard work... but important work."

Policy Recommendations

In light of the fact that the work is both hard and important, and very possibly the need for a greater degree of "steering at a distance", the MEPRI research team offers the following policy recommendations:

1. The State should provide schools districts greater guidance in developing common definitions, and greater consistency in standards and assessments. This guidance should be based on consensus of policy makers and practitioners. The existing law requires the Maine Department of Education to convene a working group to develop standards and assessment for determining student proficiency in the guiding principles. The research team believes the role, responsibilities, and authority of this working group should be expanded to encompass the entire standards-based system and proficiency-based diploma program.
2. The State should continue to develop the technical assistance plan as outlined in law, and expand their assistance to include more support for school district-level professional development. This support should assist school districts in providing more job-embedded professional development and provide school districts additional financial resources for implementing the state mandate.
3. The State schools take a greater leadership role in helping school districts develop and implement learning management systems to support standards-based proficiency-based systems. This leadership role should include assisting school districts in visioning and systems development from the early stages and onward, and should include technical

and financial assistance where needed in implementing technology-based local learning management systems.

Finally, the research team would encourage policy makers to give consideration to establishing an expanded system for the continuous monitoring of both the Maine Department of Education and individual school districts as they develop the proficiency-based diploma program as outlined in law.

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Appendix A: LD 1422

An Act To Prepare Maine People for the Future Economy

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §253, sub-§9 is enacted to read:

9. Transition to Proficiency-Based educational system. In order to facilitate the transformation of the public education system to one in which standards are used to guide curriculum and instruction and in which student advancement and graduation are based on student demonstration of proficiency in meeting educational standards, the commissioner may waive or alter any provision of this Title as specified in an approved plan for transitioning to proficiency-based graduation in accordance with section 4722-A as the provision pertains to requiring or prohibiting an action based on the age or grade level of a student. This authority applies to all age-based or grade-based requirements, except that the commissioner may not waive or alter:

A. Requirements imposed by federal law, or imposed by state law in order to comply with federal law, including but not limited to requirements relating to assessment and special education;

B. Compulsory attendance and eligibility to enroll standards; C. Provisions relating to public funding, including tuition rates;

D. Health-related provisions, if advised by health professionals not to alter the requirements; and

E. Provisions of this Title that are not administered by the commissioner, including but not limited to certain provisions relating to institutions of higher education.

The commissioner shall adopt rules to implement this subsection. Rules adopted pursuant to this subsection before July 1, 2013 are routine technical rules pursuant to Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A. Beginning July 1, 2013, rules adopted by the commissioner pursuant to this subsection are major substantive rules pursuant to Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §2902, sub-§3, as repealed and replaced by PL 1985, c. 797, §22, is amended to read:

3. Courses required by law. Provide instruction in elementary schools as specified in sections 4701, 4704, 4706 and 4711 and in secondary schools as specified in sections 4701, 4704, 4706, 4722, 4723 and 4724.

Sec. 3. 20-A MRSA §4502, sub-§1, as amended by PL 2001, c. 454, §12, is further amended to read:

1. General requirements. Elementary and secondary schools and school administrative units, including an educational program or school located in or operated by a juvenile correctional facility, shall meet all requirements of the system of learning results as established in section 6209 as well as other requirements of this Title and other statutory requirements applicable to the public schools and basic school approval standards. Each school administrative unit shall prepare and implement a comprehensive education plan that is aligned with the system of learning results, focused on the learning of all students and oriented to continuous improvement. The comprehensive education plan must include a plan for transitioning to proficiency-based graduation in accordance with section 4722-A. This plan must also address all other plans required by the department.

Sec. 4. 20-A MRSA §4502, sub-§6, as repealed and replaced by PL 2001, c. 454, §15, is amended to read:

6. Annual report on comprehensive education plan. The superintendent shall make an annual report of progress on the comprehensive education plan, developed pursuant to subsection 1, to the citizens of the school administrative unit. The school board shall annually review and approve the plan. The superintendent shall certify progress on the plan to the commissioner on an annual basis and shall submit to the commissioner a copy of the minutes of the school board meeting at which the school board reviewed and approved the plan.

Sec. 5. 20-A MRSA §4502, sub-§8, as enacted by PL 2001, c. 454, §16, is amended to read:

8. Waivers. The commissioner may grant a school administrative unit a waiver of one or more school approval requirements upon receipt of an application from the school administrative unit that includes the basis for the waiver request and a plan to reduce reliance on waivers in subsequent years. Financial hardship is one criterion the commissioner must consider in determining whether to grant a waiver.

A. Financial hardship is one criterion the commissioner must consider in determining whether to grant a waiver.

B. A request to waive the requirement for a transition plan to proficiency-based graduation in accordance with section 4722-A by January 1, 2017 must include specific information about the reason for the waiver request and a date by which the proficiency-based graduation requirement will be met. Any waiver granted by the commissioner under this paragraph must require an annual report to the commissioner on the school administrative unit's progress toward meeting the requirements of section 4722-A. This paragraph is repealed July 1, 2020.

C. The commissioner shall provide a report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature

having jurisdiction over education matters by February 1st annually on the number of waivers provided pursuant to paragraph B, including the reasons for the waivers granted. The commissioner shall promptly post the annual report submitted pursuant to this paragraph on the department's publicly accessible website.

This paragraph is repealed July 1, 2020.

Sec. 6. 20-A MRSA §4722, sub-§§7 and 8 are enacted to read:

7. Applicability of requirements; transition to proficiency-based diploma.

Except as provided in section 4722-A, this section applies to the granting of diplomas to secondary school students before January 1, 2017.

8. Repeal. This section is repealed July 1, 2020.

Sec. 7. 20-A MRSA §4722-A is enacted to read: §4722-A. Proficiency-based diploma standards

Beginning January 1, 2017, a diploma indicating graduation from a secondary school must be based on student demonstration of proficiency as described in this section. The commissioner may permit a school administrative unit to award diplomas under this section prior to January 1, 2017 if the commissioner finds that the unit's plan for awarding diplomas meets the criteria for proficiency-based graduation under this section.

1. Requirements for award of diploma. In order to receive a diploma indicating graduation from secondary school, a student must:

A. Demonstrate that the student engaged in educational experiences relating to English language arts, mathematics and science and technology in each year of the student's secondary schooling;

B. Demonstrate proficiency in meeting state standards in all content areas of the system of learning results established under section 6209;

C. Demonstrate proficiency in each of the guiding principles set forth in department rules governing implementation of the system of learning results established pursuant to section 6209; and

D. Meet any other requirements specified by the governing body of the school administrative unit attended by the student.

2. Method of gaining and demonstrating proficiency. Students must be allowed to gain proficiency through multiple pathways, as described in section 4703, and must be allowed to demonstrate proficiency by presenting multiple types of evidence, including but not limited to

teacher-designed or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performance, exhibitions and projects.

3. Exceptions. Notwithstanding subsection 1, a student may be awarded a diploma indicating graduation from a secondary school in the following circumstances.

A. A child with a disability, as defined in section 7001, subsection 1-B, who achieves proficiency as required in subsection 1, as specified by the goals and objectives of the child's individualized education plan, may be awarded a high school diploma.

B. A student who has satisfactorily completed the freshman year in an accredited degree-granting institution of higher education may be eligible to receive a high school diploma from the school the student last attended.

C. A student who experiences education disruption, as described in section 5001-A, subsection 4, paragraph F, who successfully demonstrates proficiency as required in subsection 1 as set forth in the student's school work recognition plan as defined in section 5161 must, with the approval of the commissioner, be awarded a Department of Education diploma as defined in section 5161.

D. A school administrative unit may award a high school diploma to a student who has met the standards set forth in a waiver request that was approved by the commissioner pursuant to section 4502, subsection 8.

E. A person may be awarded a high school diploma, including a posthumous award, if the person or a family member of the person applies to a secondary school and:

(1) The person:

(a) Attended a secondary school in the geographic area now served by the secondary school from which a diploma is requested; or

(b) Resides at the time of application for a diploma in the geographic area served by the secondary school from which a diploma is requested;

(2) The person did not graduate or receive a diploma from a secondary school because the person left secondary school to serve in the Armed Forces and served during the following periods:

(a) World War II, from December 7, 1941 to August 16, 1945; (b) The Korean Conflict; or (c) The Vietnam War era, from February 28, 1961 to May 7, 1975; and

(3) The person received an honorable discharge or a certificate of honorable service from the

Armed Forces.

For the purposes of this paragraph, "Armed Forces" means the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and the Merchant Marines.

4. Grants; contingent extension of full implementation. During the period of transition to proficiency-based graduation in accordance with this section, the department, if funds are available, shall make annual transition grants to each school administrative unit equal to 1/10 of 1% of the school administrative unit's total cost of education calculated under section 15688, subsection 1 to be used in the manner determined by the school administrative unit to fund the costs of the transition not otherwise subsidized by the State. The date for implementation of the awarding of diplomas based on student demonstration of proficiency as described in this section is extended one year for each year for which transition grants are not made available to a school administrative unit of for which levels of general purpose aid for local schools fall below school year 2012- 2013 levels.

Sec. 8. 20-A MRSA §13016, sub-§2, as amended by PL 1991, c. 622, Pt. X, §8, is further amended to read:

2. Professional teacher certificates. A professional teacher certificate may be renewed for 5-year periods in accordance with state board rules, which must require, at a minimum, that the teacher complete at least 6 hours of professional or academic study, or in-service training designed to improve the performance of the teacher in the field for which the teacher holds an endorsement, or in a related subject area, or to improve the teacher's knowledge of, and skill in, Proficiency-Based education. Teachers who desire to qualify for a master teacher certificate must coordinate their continuing professional education with the requirements of an applicable teacher action plan.

Sec. 9. Development of Proficiency-Based system tools. The Department of Education shall coordinate the development of standards, assessments and assessment criteria needed to enable school administrative units to implement a Proficiency-Based system of education.

1. The Department of Education shall convene a working group to develop standards, assessments and assessment criteria for determining student proficiency in the guiding principles as outlined in department rule that are required for secondary school graduation beginning January 1, 2017. The working group must include representatives from school administrative units currently developing those standards, assessments and assessment criteria. The working group shall develop draft standards, assessments and assessment criteria for review not later than July 1, 2013.

2. The Department of Education shall maintain a publicly accessible website to serve as a resource for schools implementing Proficiency-Based education systems. The website must:

A. Include information about the experience of school administrative units that are engaged in transforming their schools to Proficiency-Based systems, including schools involved in the Maine Cohort for Customized Learning and the League of Innovative Schools of the New England Secondary School Consortium;

B. Include a repository of model materials, including but not limited to report cards and transcripts, assessment methodologies and assessment criteria for all content areas of the system of learning results;

C. Be designed to facilitate communication among educators and administrators on the transformation of schools to Proficiency-Based education systems; and

D. Provide information for school administrative units seeking to create regional capacity to implement Proficiency-Based education systems, including information about applying for a grant from the Fund for the Efficient Delivery of Educational Services established pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 2651 and information about school administrative units that are currently engaging in regional cooperation in delivering education.

Sec. 10. Development of technical assistance plan. The Department of Education shall develop a technical assistance plan that includes a timeline with implementation dates for the resources and initiatives the department will provide to enable school administrative units to transition to a Proficiency-Based education system. The technical assistance plan must include but is not limited to the Proficiency-Based system tools described in section 9, other resources related to model policies and best practices, professional development and training and other initiatives that the department determines will be necessary for school administrative units to transform their schools to a Proficiency-Based education system. The technical assistance plan must be presented to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters for review by March 1, 2013. The joint standing committee may introduce a bill to the First Regular Session of the 126th Legislature related to the department's activities described in this section and section 9.

Sec. 11. Amendment of age-based and grade-based statutory provisions.

The Department of Education shall submit a bill to the First Regular Session of the 126th Legislature to amend provisions of the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A that unreasonably restrict the ability of school administrative units to advance or graduate students based on demonstrated proficiency in education standards. The bill may include an amendment to the rule making