

For Immediate Release

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Superintendents give low grade to Essential Programs and Services school funding formula.

PolicyOne Research, Inc. surveyed all Maine school superintendents and found much dissatisfaction with the new school funding formula. Recommends a task force be appointed to review the formula. Report released to legislators.

Portland, Maine, March 11, 2005. Maine school superintendents are leaders of the state's commitment to public education, overseeing almost 700 schools of various configurations throughout the state. Therefore, in an effort to gather the concerns and opinions of superintendents and to enrich the current debate about school funding, PolicyOne Research, Inc. recently offered a survey about the Essential Programs and Services school funding program to each Maine school superintendent. A. Mavourneen Thompson, co-owner with Jim Damicis of PolicyOne, reported that "We are recommending a task force be appointed to review and study the EPS formula as it is instituted. Its complexity and politically high profile requires that an independent task force review the model and advise the Legislature as the new formula is implemented and continues to unfold."

The respondents, numbering 48 out of 151 school superintendents, or 32 percent of superintendents in Maine, represented 59,502 students, or 29 percent of the total 2004-2005 student population. Taken together, the respondents created a profile that showed them to be, in many ways, similar or typical of all superintendents and school units; although the responding superintendents represented districts that on average are not projected to experience as high an increase in state aid as average districts statewide. Following is a summary of the findings:

Superintendents were critical in their grading of EPS: one fifth gave the model a "C" for "Fair" and one-fifth a "D" for "Poor" while almost 40 percent graded EPS "F" for "Failure". More specifically, superintendents generally responded that they did not have enough information about EPS to adequately explain the program's implications to

their communities, although they agreed that they understood its implications for their units. In terms of the adequacy of EPS to sufficiently predict each unit's costs for educating students, superintendents expressed little confidence, reporting that funding would be insufficient to meet the Learning Results. Respondents reported that teachers and administrators had too little input into the development of the funding model.

Furthermore, according to a majority of the responding superintendents, student and taxpayer equity would remain an elusive goal even with the imposition of EPS. While most superintendents disagreed that EPS would reduce taxpayer burdens throughout Maine, more than one-third of respondents reported that suburban and urban communities would fare better than rural communities.

The EPS model would negatively affect schools' attempts to meet the interrelated goals of hiring skilled teachers, providing quality instruction and meeting high learning standards, according to the respondents. Superintendents largely agreed, as well, that EPS would not provide sufficient allocations for special education, transportation, facilities, extra-curricular activities, at-risk students and students who are learning English as a second language. More than a majority of respondents reported that teacher-student ratios, as delineated in the EPS model, would be inadequate.

Finally, to the perennial question of how much money a community needs from the state in order to provide a strong education program for its students, the superintendents disagreed that property valuation was an accurate measure of community wealth. Instead, they generally agreed that income should be considered in the measure of wealth. Furthermore, would EPS distribute funds more equitably than the previous formula? Most superintendents said no.

According to A. Mavourneen Thompson, the lead analyst, "The survey, clearly revealed questions and disagreement by superintendents that the EPS funding model would be a sufficient vehicle for sharing state funds with communities as they work to educate their students. It is now time for the state to address these concerns and put in place a mechanism for on-going, independent, review."