

Cutler-Maine

**Gubernatorial Candidate Questionnaire 2010**  
**SCHOOL CHOICE & CHARTER SCHOOLS**

1. Please explain your position and level of commitment for increasing the number of quality school options, specifically including the issues of  
a.) public charter schools and  
b) 'vouchers'

Provide as much or as little detail as you feel is necessary to better understand your position. Our children are the greatest resource for the future prosperity of our state – if we can keep them in Maine or encourage them to return, and employ them in the new jobs that our competitive, global economy demands. Too many young adults graduate from Maine high schools without the knowledge and skills necessary to enter the workforce or college, leaving our state with an undereducated workforce that is a poor match for the world's burgeoning knowledge economy. To ensure that every Maine child has equal opportunity to succeed, we must create a climate of excitement, reform and innovation in our schools and foster better education at lower costs.

All of our schools can and must do better. But for those children whose traditional public school is not productive, there needs to be another option. I will advocate for legislation that will permit the state to charter innovative, autonomous, small public schools to serve those children who are not being supported in our regular public schools. Public charters will bring together educators, small business entrepreneurs seeking to incubate and grow "green" and locally sustainable enterprises, artists and others to create challenging and exciting opportunities for the students enrolled.

The Cutler administration will also help communities create magnet school choices for their students by using existing facilities. Several of our communities are already beginning to collaborate in creating specialty educational programs emphasizing the arts, or sciences, or technology that will help students maximize their potential in all content areas by offering programs that can be structured around students' individual interests. Portland has done this with its groundbreaking "expeditionary learning" model at Casco Bay High school.

I do not support providing vouchers to student attending private schools

**ACCOUNTABILITY & INTERVENTIONS for LOW PERFORMERS**

2. What sorts of accountability measures for student results, if any, should public schools, school districts, and the state use or adopt? And specifically for chronically low-performing schools, how should the state and/or districts intervene? Please incorporate in your response whether, as governor, you would support federal turnaround strategies for chronically failing schools.

I believe in looking at growth and gain and how much a student is improving each year based on a variety of indicators and on the efforts of a variety of educators. Where we can identify student success, we should reward those individual educators, the teams and the schools responsible for accelerating student progress. We need to shine a spotlight on, learn from and replicate that success.

Chronically low-performing schools need the support and expertise of the state and other districts to achieve growth in student performance. I believe that the development of improvement strategies should be a collaborative process involving all stakeholders -- including parents, school board members, teachers, administrators, and unions. All stakeholders should be involved in redesigning low-performing schools, setting priorities focused on student learning and developing an action plan for improvement. Depending on the outcome, restarting a failing school as a public charter school may be the most

workable strategy.

As part of any intervention on behalf of students in a low performing school, we must ensure that our educators are provided with the tools necessary to exercise strong leadership, meaningfully use student data and target professional development to develop capacity for new instructional strategies.

Transforming a chronically low performing school into a charter school is one of the four approaches adopted by Congress. While I support this approach as a feasible alternative, I would also advocate for greater flexibility from the federal government for rural states like Maine.

### **GREAT TEACHERS & LEADERS**

3. What steps should school districts and the state take to ensure that the most effective teachers and principals are present in every school, and what will you do to support such policies if elected governor? When answering please speak specifically to the issues of

a) teacher and principal credentialing/licensure

Maine does not make it difficult for people with a wide variety of BA-level credentials to enter either teaching or administration. The course requirements and the mentoring/support systems are meant to enable applicants to become skilled teachers before they can obtain a “professional” level certificate, but too many young teachers lack these supports. We need to make sure that good people want to enter and stay in the teaching profession. Too many public schools in Maine appear indifferent to high quality teaching and leadership. Of course, there are outstanding exceptions to this -- primarily thanks to strong local leadership by school boards and superintendents. We need to make sure this is the general rule, not the exception.

b) teacher and principal compensation

With one-third of our teachers expected to retire in the near future, how we will attract the best and the brightest to Maine, especially to our most rural areas? According to data for 2006-2007, per capita income in Maine was 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation. Yet Maine ranked 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation on teachers’ salaries compared to the national average, and we ranked last among the New England states. The fact that our teachers make considerably less than the national average, coupled with our demographics, has serious implications for the future availability of dedicated and high performing teachers.

I believe that educators and teams of educators who demonstrate their ability to improve student achievement ought to be rewarded for their efforts. Recognition for growth in student success should not look only to student test scores nor should rewards be limited to pay. My plan will reward successful collaboration and support opportunities for school leadership and targeted professional development. The present system, a simplistic seniority based system, which makes no distinction between those who lead and teach effectively and those who do not, is not serving either children or the public well, and does not drive school improvement based on teacher collaboration and effective mentoring.

Educators should be recognized, rewarded and celebrated as true professionals when they serve our students well and should not be limited by a lock-step salary schedule, which hurts our state in efforts to recruit and retain top-level teaching talent. As Governor, I will create new models – like the Comp Q Program adopted in Minnesota – whereby superintendents, principals, teachers and other educators or groups of educators who demonstrate student growth are recognized for those efforts as part of targeted professional development, increased leadership opportunities and better compensation.

b) teacher tenure

Good teacher must be rewarded for good teaching, but this does not mean we should preserve tenure and lock step salary increases for teachers while student enrollments and performance continue to fall. I support implementing a clearer and more rigorous teacher evaluation system, in which teachers assume a meaningful role in peer review and administrators are supported by their school boards to conduct rigorous evaluations.

### **SCHOOL FINANCE & BUDGETING – FUNDS FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION**

4. What is your opinion on your state's current K-12 funding level; for example, is it sufficient, inadequate, or somewhere in between?

In general, it is sufficient but we need to get smarter about how we allocate our resources to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to meet world-class standards and compete in a global economy. Based on national rankings of the states, Maine's expenditures on K-12 spending are generous but our student performance is flat or declining. A review of Maine's current funding law known as "Essential Programs and Services" and its impacts local districts is in order.

5. As governor, would you propose to continue to fund the K-12 education system essentially as it is done today, or would you propose significant changes (funds following students, increased transparency on financial reporting, new approaches to assure return on investment, etc.)?

We need to reduce our reliance on the link between local property valuations and the formula for state local cost sharing on education funding. However, we need greater clarity on how local schools spend their state share of educational dollars. I believe public charter schools could offer a good pilot mechanism for expanding existing rules on funds following students.

#### **'RACE TO THE TOP'**

6. Although your state is no longer eligible for Race to the Top funds, your state submitted an application that proposed a number of reforms. Even without the federal funds, as governor, would you seek to implement a number of those proposed reforms in your state?

Maine needs to do much better than the recently enacted legislation that permits "innovative" schools and adopt legislation that will permit parents, traditional and non-traditional educators, and communities to create school models that are still public, but accountable for student learning, and not to the traditional way of governing and operating schools.

The proposed changes in LD 1801 – which was introduced in an effort to increase Maine's chances of receiving funds under President Obama's Race to the Top education initiative – do not respond to the Race to the Top challenge or make possible innovative and autonomous schools, much less promote reform. The proposed so-called "Innovative Schools" under LD 1801 would be required to meet virtually all existing statutory and regulatory requirements, ensuring that they will be bound up in the same red tape that too often diverts a school's energy and resources away from educational excellence. It also means these schools won't be able to reduce costs, one of the hallmark accomplishments of charter schools nationwide.

The new law also adopts the national teachers' union policy on charter schools – which means that these schools will be subject to the same labor relations statutes and collective bargaining requirements as traditional schools. LD 1801 permits only local school boards to authorize these schools, denying parents the innovative and autonomous charter school options presented in most states by other sponsors, such as the State Board of Education, colleges and universities and local non-profit organizations.

Finally, the bill makes possible experiments with unconventional staffing and scheduling – but only so long as they don't interfere with existing state laws. Schools would not be allowed to develop alternative compensation arrangements, such as basing teacher compensation on growth in student performance. I strongly support efforts to link teacher and principal evaluation with student performance (see my answer to 3b above).

#### **COMMON CORE STANDARDS**

7. As governor, would you support your state's adoption of national 'common core' standards?  
Yes.