

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the adjournment of the Second Regular Session of the 124th Legislature, the Chairs of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs (Education Committee) met with nonpartisan legislative staff to explore the parameters of a research project that would assemble programmatic and financial information that profiled the programs operated by the Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE). Recalling that the introductory meeting of the Education Committee (in January 2009) was a joint public hearing with the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs (Appropriations Committee) on the Governor's Emergency Budget bill -- and that the Education Committee spent the next few days contemplating recommendations for budget reductions to Maine DOE (and other agency) programs -- the Education Committee Chairs wanted to ensure that legislators who serve on the next Education Committee would have resource materials available to familiarize them with Maine DOE program funding on "day one" of the 125th Legislature.

Education Committee leadership, including Senator Justin Alford, Representative Patricia Sutherland and Representative David Richardson, submitted a formal request to the Legislative Council seeking authorization for a comprehensive overview of Maine DOE program funding to be conducted by nonpartisan legislative staff.¹ During its July 2010 meeting, the Legislative Council approved the request and directed the nonpartisan staff to conduct the study and report its findings and recommendations to the Legislative Council no later than November 3, 2010. The Executive Director of the Legislative Council subsequently assigned nonpartisan staff from the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis (OPLA) and the Office of Fiscal and Program Review (OFPR) to conduct the staff study. On behalf of the Legislative Council, the Executive Director contacted the Commissioner of Education and the Commissioner of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFS) to notify them of the objectives of the staff study and to request the cooperation of Maine DOE and DAFS staff in providing any necessary information to complete the study.²

Scope of the Staff Study

The OPLA and OFPR staff assigned to the study reviewed the work plan approved by the Legislative Council and began to examine the Maine Department of Education's financial and program information, including budget bill enacted for the most recent biennium, expenditure data pertaining to DOE programs and the 2007 Program Evaluation Report transmitted by the Department to the Legislature pursuant to the Government Evaluation Act (GEA) to determine the best method of obtaining the information necessary to provide the Legislature with a complete and thorough understanding of the programs and services provided by the Department of Education, the population and/or constituencies that received those programs and services and the financial and human resources that are expended or anticipated to be expended in order to deliver them. After reviewing several approaches, it was decided to utilize the format of the Department of Education's 2007 Program Evaluation Report transmitted by the Maine DOE to the Legislature pursuant to the Government Evaluation Act (GEA) and to add a section to

¹ See Appendix A.

² See Appendix B.

include actual and budgeted expenditure data for each program included in the GEA. Legislative staff held preliminary meetings with Maine DOE senior staff in early August to review the scope of the study, including an extensive list of the Department's programs to be included in the study, requests for program data necessary to complete the study, and a timeline for transmittal of the requested information. Following these initial discussions, OPLA staff sent a written request for qualitative information for specific DOE programs and followed up with Maine DOE staff to clarify questions regarding the information provided. OFPR staff began gathering actual and budgeted expenditure data for the current biennium for each of the programs to be included in the study as well as headcount and position information for those employees assigned to provide support to the programs. OFPR staff worked with staff from both the Maine DOE and DAFS to address questions that arose during the course of gathering the data.

As part of our information requests, we provided the Maine DOE with a "sample" program summary template (adapted from the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report) with the qualitative data that was requested for completing this study. We also requested that Maine DOE update the program descriptions contained in the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report and submit information requested for this study using the "sample" program summary template. We also asked that, to the extent possible, Maine DOE personnel provide an "electronic copy" of these updated program descriptions. Taken together, OPLA and OFPR staff requested the following qualitative and financial data elements from Maine DOE staff to complete this study for the Legislature.

1. The purpose of the program. Program purpose statements from the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report; (updated, as necessary).

2. The population served by the program. Data for constituencies served from the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report; (updated, as necessary, by Maine DOE program personnel to provide the most recent data available, preferably fiscal year (FY) 2010, for the population served by the program).

3. Funding for the program from all funding sources. Appropriations, allocations and expenditure data for FY 2009, 2010 and 2011 (updated, as necessary, by Maine DOE program personnel and DAFS budget personnel).

4. DOE leadership and staff support for the program. Information for program leadership and staff support from the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report; (updated, as necessary, by Maine DOE program personnel to provide the most recent data available, preferably for FY 2010, for Legislative Count Positions broken out by funding source).

5. Performance data on the effectiveness of the program. Performance data collected or reported for the program from the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report; (updated, as necessary, by Maine DOE program personnel to provide the most recent data available, including URL for web-based data or reports).

Since the deadline for preparing this report was November 3rd, legislative staff requested that DOE personnel provide the most recent data available – preferably in an electronic format –

no later than September 1st. As we received and reviewed the DOE program data submissions, certain DOE personnel were contacted to review the data for accuracy and any necessary follow-up requests. As noted above, our inquiries to the Maine DOE and DAFS for information related to these key elements of the staff study. Maine DOE and DAFS staff spent a considerable amount of time preparing revisions to the 2007 DOE Program Evaluation Report, clarifying fiscal and program information, and reviewing draft program summaries to confirm the accuracy of the program summaries.³

The final section of this report presents the work products produced by OPLA and OFPR and includes both narrative summaries of the Maine DOE Programs as defined by Budgetary Program Accounts, as well as charts, tables and graphs that illustrate the funding provided to Maine DOE programs. The following section of the report summarizes the recommendations of legislative staff and suggested issues for future consideration by the 125th Legislature. An organization chart of the Department of Education is included as Appendix D.

³ See Appendix C for a list of individuals who served as a resource or who provided information for this study.