



*Help schools be test-ready and engage in effective, schoolwide professional development.*

N.B. Data collection for this SEA took place between July 2007 and April 2008.

## CONTEXT

Maine has a population of 1.3 million that is largely rural and 96% White, compared to a 67% White population in the entire United States. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). The total student population is 195,498 (Hoffman, 2007). Although the general school enrollment is declining slowly, there is an increasing population of immigrants who have settled in the urban centers. Historically, Maine has had a high-achieving school system.

Many schools throughout the state are widely dispersed across rural areas. In many cases, isolated schools are also designated as a district. This has resulted in a limited capacity for such schools to generate the professional development and support they need, particularly when they are designated as low performing (interview with Maine Department of Education [ME DOE] official, July 9, 2007). After intensive statewide study, a regionalization plan was developed and was still under debate in the legislature in Fall 2008. This approach is intended to cluster isolated schools, allowing for greater supports to become available.

Maine first passed legislation related to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2007. Maine Statute Title 20A (Section 1301, 1303) (State of Maine, 2007) gives the Commissioner the right to petition a review of a school for the first time. Prior to the legislation, the state had no formal authority over schools. No reviews had taken place as of 2008, but the legislation anticipates the need for reviews for persistently low-performing schools. The state is crafting a school accountability system that draws on NCLB experience in working with low-performing schools.

## Selection Criteria

Maine's state accountability plan outlining how the state holds schools and districts accountable was filed with the U.S. Department of Education in August 2005 (ME DOE, 2005). Table ME-1 outlines the ways in which the state's plan addresses the 10 principles required by NCLB. To determine whether schools have met adequate yearly progress (AYP) criteria, the state uses reading and math scores on the state assessments and a target participation rate of 95%.

**Table ME-1. Maine AYP Measures**

NCLB AYP Determination Requirement	Maine's Approach
<b>Assessment</b>	Maine Educational Assessment; Maine High School Assessment (this is the SAT Reasoning Test with an augment in math and added science section)
<b>Proficiency Target</b>	Percent Proficient
<b>Starting Point</b>	20th Percentile
<b>Participation</b>	95%—achieved 99%
<b>Additional Measure</b>	Attendance/Graduation Rate
<b>Additional Provisions</b>	Average scores up to 2 previous years for high schools and averaging of scores across grades within a school
<b>Minimum Number for Subgroups</b>	
Accountability/Performance	20
Participation	41
<b>Confidence Intervals</b>	95%
<b>Other</b>	No

**Source:** U.S. Department of Education, 2007.

If a school enrolls elementary and high school grades (i.e., Grades 7–12), the scores for each grade level will be reviewed, and if any one grade level does not make AYP, then the school as a whole will be identified as not making AYP. The AYP status for K–2 schools in the state is determined based on the performance of Grade 3 students on the state assessment. If Grade 3 students do not make AYP, the “feeder” K–2 school is then determined to have missed making AYP. The 2007–2008 school year was the first in which K–2 schools were designated as in need of improvement (INI) in Maine. Table ME-2 shows the number and percentage of low-performing schools in Maine, as well as the number of years they have been designated as such.

**Table ME-2. Maine Low-Performing Schools, Academic Year 2007–2008**

No. of Schools in State	No. (%) of Schools Designated as Low-Performing	Number of Years Designated								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Exiting
634	94 (15%)	28	41	15	10	-	-	-	-	9

**Note:** Years Designated corresponds to previously noted NCLB designations accordingly: Year 1 = INI (year 1), Year 2 = INI (year 2), Year 3 = Corrective Action, Year 4 = Restructuring (year 1), Year 5 = Restructuring (year 2), Year 6 = Restructuring (year 3), Year 7 = Restructuring (year 4), Year 8 = Restructuring (year 5).

**Source:** Maine Department of Education, 2007.

Aggregate scores are computed for all schools by grade level (elementary, middle, and high school). A district makes AYP if it makes AYP in any one of the three grades spans. As of May 2007, the state had no districts classified as low performing.

Note: The following sections of this profile are grounded in data gathered from state education agency (SEA) interviews and a focus group conducted between July and November 2007. The SEA website, official SEA policies and administrative policies, legislation, court cases, and other official documents supplement the interviews and focus groups.

## Interventions with Low-Performing Schools and Districts

**Table ME-3. Maine Interventions with Low-Performing Schools**

<b>Policies</b>	Maine Statute Title 20A (Section 1301, 1303) (2007) gives the Commissioner the right to petition a review of the school.
<b>Primary Focus of Intervention</b>	The primary target for intervention is the school; there are no districts in intervention.
<b>Services</b>	
Site-Specific	<p>First-year intervention: In spring of “monitor year,” schools are consulted on understanding their status, data patterns, and changes to hasten their exit.</p> <p>In the second year, a Distinguished Educator visits the school six to eight times for plan development. S/he remains in contact and seeks to respond to principal requests related to implementation.</p> <p>If a school persists in this status, process consultation continues, with a focus on helping identify changes needed to comply with its status.</p>
Planning Assistance	There are consultations and/or facilitation, with an emphasis on educating the school team about high-quality professional development and how it can be engaged to systemically improve instructional weaknesses. At the same time, there is limited local capacity to implement professional development.

<b>Work with Data</b>	Distinguished Educators provide tools and support for data analysis and then identify strategies for students on the “cusp” of the next performance level. Three short-term strategies to improve scores are to improve the testing environment, teacher motivation in giving the test, and student readiness.
<b>Professional Development</b>	Two schools are collaborating in a formative assessment pilot. This year, schools are invited to join conference calls related to topics of interest. Regional support team members know which schools are low performing and independently work with them in the content area.
<b>Convening Schools/Districts</b>	Schools participate in conference calls and receive information through a website on teaching across content areas, co-teaching, differentiating instruction, and formative assessment. Topics are based on school needs.
<b>Sanctions</b>	See Policies section above.
<b>Monitoring</b>	Distinguished Educators and school administrators converse quarterly, in person or by phone, to track plan implementation, which includes a budget. When a strategy is completed, the school submits documentation and, if it is considered acceptable, is reimbursed for costs.
<b>Other</b>	The SAT Reasoning Test, with augments to the math component and the addition of a science section, was instituted as the state accountability test for all 10th-graders for 2005–06; it is called the Maine High School Assessment. Beginning in February 2007, a free SAT prep course (PrepMe.com) will be offered to every high school junior in Maine for 3 years.

## Rationale for Intervention

Maine’s primary rationale is that concentrated work with schools when they enter INI status will result in schools’ improving their scores, implementing sound professional development systemically, and ideally changing the culture of the school to be more focused on instruction and curriculum.

Two Distinguished Educators, one of whom is assigned to each of the schools, and one coordinator tend to this work (staff was reduced by one in 2007). They first seek to establish an understanding of a school, its history, and its culture. They work primarily with principals while inviting superintendent engagement and support. From the onset of their work, Distinguished Educators are diligent about understanding the local context and history, and about establishing respectful and trusting relationships. According to one, “It’s our strength. . . . We’re able to build a pretty strong relationship with the principals so they’ll call us if they need more support or want to exchange ideas” (ME DOE official, interview, July 9, 2007). Those working with schools posit that a strong initial relationship with school staff will result in educators calling department staff when they need support and will lead to more forthright conversations about issues of concerns and needs.

## Preconditions

With a front-loaded, specifically focused intervention, ME DOE staff set forth a substantial set of preconditions. They consider the following to be essential:

- **Principal involvement:** The principal is considered to be central to the design, school buy-in, and implementation of the intervention.
- **Whole school participation:** There needs to be buy-in from and engagement by the entire school community, along with leadership from a school-based team.
- **Superintendent involvement:** The superintendent has authority to provide support and counsel to the school and is encouraged to be involved throughout the process.
- **Special education involvement:** Each school must have a representative who teaches or administers special education, and when possible, a special education representative of the district, so they can provide support. Special education students are the most vulnerable subgroup in Maine.
- **Approved use of resources:** Each school is allocated Title I resources when it is identified as low performing; participating in ME DOE processes and consultations requires committing some of those funds to the state in order to fund the intervention.

## Strategies

Supporting the school improvement planning process is central. A Distinguished Educator visits the school six to eight times during the initial 3-month period of plan development. The principal is asked to convene a school team that must include a person representing the special education population at the school and, ideally, a district special education administrator. The superintendent is invited to the initial meeting about the intervention and is encouraged to stay involved in order to support the work. After the plan is developed, the Distinguished Educator remains in contact, mostly by phone and e-mail, and seeks to respond to principal requests to review progress and discuss implementation challenges.

Helping school teams understand patterns of achievement is another important element of support for the schools. Distinguished Educators focus initially on short-term strategies. The school team receives tools and assistance to understand trends in test data and identify students scoring on the cusp of the next performance level; strategies are then developed to help those students improve their performance: “Moving from *does not meet* to *partially meets* on the test is a big deal,” said one Distinguished Educator. Distinguished Educators also help identify short-term strategies to improve overall test scores. Three basic issues are addressed: the testing environment, teacher motivation in administering the test, and student readiness to engage with the test format and approach.

A focus on professional development is a third key strategy: “Professional development is more important because supplemental educational services don’t really help unless teaching and curriculum improve,” said an ME DOE staff member (interview, July 9, 2007). In crafting the school plans, Distinguished Educators provide guidance in understanding best practice in professional development and ensuring that high-quality professional development is detailed in the plans. She continued, “The same is true when schools submit their plan for spending state allocations. It’s different than before. [Professional development has to be] scientifically based, with a follow-up. No one-shot deals; if it’s a conference, how is it going to fit into their overall plan?” The staff working on interventions uses Nine Professional Development Principles, based on a definition of professional development from NCLB Sec. 9101 (34) (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.), as their guide.

Although there is a clear focus, the director of the state’s program noted the challenges related to professional development: “It’s pretty hard to find scientifically based professional development. [We are not always] sure what is out there; [it can be] tricky. We try to find [a program] that worked well for other schools and districts. Another option is the state piloting a new type of professional development” (interview, July 9, 2007). One example is a pilot on formative assessment; another is long-distance learning sessions open to all low-performing schools. In the 2007–2008 school year, schools were participating in conference calls and receiving information through a website that addresses teaching across content areas, co-teaching, differentiating instruction, and formative assessment. This was a pilot of what may become a multimedia webinar series with topics selected based on school-identified needs. In Maine, physically convening schools has not worked because of the geographic distances between many of the schools.

This model is important to the ME DOE staff, both because the need for formative assessments has become clear in school planning and because it is vital to develop strategies where rural communities can connect and support one another. Regional support team members know which schools are low performing and work with them independently in the content area that needs attention.

If a school persists in low-performing status, the same process consultation occurs each year. At this time, facilitation shifts to helping school leadership identify what changes they will employ to comply with Corrective Action or Restructuring status. And, other departments within the ME DOE are informed about the school’s status and are sometimes engaged to join in support.

Maine provides support to schools that have not made AYP for a second year. In the spring after their identification, these “Monitor Schools” are assigned consultants to help clarify the reasons for the status. The consultants also help the schools identify the patterns in test data and suggest strategies to enable the schools to make changes that will hasten exiting low-performing status.

## Intended Outcomes

In addition to making the expected AYP in state scores, ME DOE staff (interview, July 9, 2007) point to several indicators of success:

- Movement of students on the cusp of proficiency to the next level on their test scores
- Completion of the activities outlined in a school improvement plan
- Change to a more cohesive and connected view of and approach to professional development
- Changes in instructional strategies to respond to student needs
- Shifts in school culture to focus on students and the staff's expectations for them
- Schools' positive experiences with ME DOE staff

## Lead SEA Contact(s)

Rachelle Tome, Accountability Director, Title I Accountability and School Improvement Office, Maine Department of Education.

## Challenges and Future Plans

Sometimes superintendents are more engaged; sometimes less. ME DOE staff see superintendent support as an important lever for school progress, when it is in place. Limited funds and capacity were identified as another challenge by department staff: "The only money I can use is the administrative money, so I can't do anything," reported the Accountability Director, Title I Accountability and School Improvement Office Coordinator (interview, July 9, 2007).

There are situations in which schools do not emerge from low-performing status and may not make progress on other informal indicators. When the challenges at a school go beyond the absence of a coherent, systemic professional development plan, the team identifies the issues as out of their purview. As one official noted, "These are structural issues" (interview, July 9, 2007). Such issues include serious school climate problems or special education services not delivered in a manner that works for the student population. In these cases, the staff working on interventions has started forging partnerships with other parts of the department to see how they can add to the intervention.

The majority of schools are only using standardized tests as data sources for student performance. The ME DOE wants to encourage all educators to think about multiple measures and learn to use them in reflecting on and shaping student performance. A pilot initiative on formative assessment is forging this new path. There are also questions about how to coordinate better with other parts of the department.

On a broader level, Maine's Federal Program Services Team Leader and Policy Director points to the intervention as informing a statewide plan to provide support and accountability to all schools across the state. This plan is in the development stages.

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