

May 13, 2008

To: The Board of Education, MSAD 16

From: The District Curriculum Leadership Team, MSAD 16; Gary Chapin, Chris Chamberlain, Dan Crocker, Brenda Dalbeck, Chris Poulin, Truax McFarland, Tim Soule, Misty Favreau, Scott Hunt, Jeff Smith, Kirsten Langmeyer, Sara Frautten.

Dear Board Members,

After the recent public meeting on Standards-Based reporting and looking ahead to our informational meeting on May 21<sup>st</sup>, we – your DCLT – felt it necessary to reaffirm our support for standards-based reporting, and to try to explain that support in as clear terms as possible. We also hope to address some of the specific concerns being brought up regarding this issue.

Over the past ten years, since the implementation of the Maine Learning Results, the faculty of MSAD 16 has engaged in professional development and research around the subjects of standards-based instruction, education, and reporting. Teachers from all levels – elementary, middle, and high school – have engaged in hundreds of hours of work exploring this issue. We have attended conferences. We have formed faculty-led research and action groups. We have participated in summer symposia sponsored by the Maine DOE, Promising Futures, and Great Maine Schools. We have worked in K-12 content area teams to understand, pilot, and implement the best of these practices. We have sent teams to schools working from a standards-based model to observe their practices. We have done this at the request of the district, having been asked to determine whether or not moving towards a standards-based system would benefit our district. The answer we have come to is unequivocally: Yes. Moving to a standards-based system – including instruction, assessment, and reporting – will prove invaluable to improving the achievement of *all of our students*. All of the research – e.g., the work of Michael Fullan, Kenneth O'Connor, Robert Marzano, Grant Wiggins, etc. – has strongly indicated that adoption of a standards-based system improves student achievement. The fact that we have seen similar improvements in student achievement at our own elementary school over the past seven years only reinforces the point.

Having said that, we would like to address specific concerns.

### **What about class rank and GPA?**

To be absolutely clear: there will be no difficulty in producing class honors and class rank. The DCLT approves of the proposed recognition program based on the Latin *cum laude*, *magna cum laude*, and *summa cum laude* honorifics. The DCLT has proposed a class rank system according to the number of standards on which a student has achieved an *Exceeds*. We resist the idea of a GPA because the practices of a standards-based system are antithetical to the averaging of grades. In fact, if there is one dominant consensus in the research on standards-based practice, it's that the averaging of grades

obscures and diminishes the achievements of *all* students. Still, generating a GPA based on the 1 through 4 system, for scholarships or transcripts, could be done.

### **What about colleges?**

Between Steve MacDougall, Gary Chapin, and Dennis Monroe, we have talked to admissions representatives at more than a dozen colleges in and out of Maine. These have been both public and private, and of a variety of levels. Not one school indicated that there would be any problem with a standards-based transcript. Beyond admissions directors, we also spoke to the national director of the Association of the College Admissions Directors of America. At our public meeting on May 6, she indicated, unequivocally, that a standards-based transcript would offer no barrier to the acceptance of our kids, and, in fact, could prove *more* informative and useful for admission decisions. (Not to mention the improvements that standards-based practice promotes in *actual student achievement*.) Finally, we have talked to the guidance department of Poland Regional High School, which has been graduating students from its standards-based system for four years. They reported that *only one* school has balked at their standards-based report card. This was a school of cosmetology based in southern Maine. We feel as if this question has been answered.

### **What about the fact that we haven't even decided the grade scale yet?**

Last year, the DCLT and full faculty discussed this issue thoroughly and through a full faculty vote, decided that a scale of 1, 2, 3, and 4 would best serve our district and its students. We decided, also, that rather than averaging – a practice that *hides* information rather than *providing* it – we would base report card grades on trending, a research-based practice which looks at the pattern of performance to determine whether or not it's been demonstrated that the standard has been met.

### **What about the reports we've heard of inconsistent implementation in the Middle School?**

Many of the complications and confusions arising in the Middle School came not from standards-based practice *per se*, but from the fact that the Middle School faculty was running a dual system, reporting in both the standards and traditional methods. It should be noted that many Middle School faculty objected to the idea of dual reporting for just this reason. The reports of rubrics in the Middle School which had no "4" – or no chance to exceed the standard – were, in fact, reports of formative assessments. These are assessments done by the teacher to determine whether or not the student "gets it" up to that point. They are done solely to guide instruction and do not "count" toward the final grade. Every summative assessment – the ones that "count" – offers an opportunity to exceed the standard. We, the DCLT, need to say that the Middle School faculty deserves kudos for piloting standards-based practices and reporting in their classrooms. It is unfortunate that the dual system resulted in confusion and unease for parents.

### **Is the faculty ready?**

Yes. As indicated above, we have spent hundreds of hours developing the capacity to implement standards-based practice. Further, we have developed the ongoing structures – such as the DCLT, content-area teams, professional learning communities, and grade level teams – necessary to implement such a change. Is there some uncertainty? Some anxiety? Yes. The scope of this change is considerable. We’re taking that seriously.

### **Finally ...**

One common element that comes up in this discussion is that parents seem to appreciate all of the facets of standards-based practice – the rubrics, the interventions, etc. – but are uncertain about the reporting of standards. Having participated in a pilot of standards-based reporting with the High School social studies teachers, and having watched the current pilot in the Middle School, it’s clear that the benefits of standards-based practice are significantly undermined by having to report out in the traditional method. These benefits are further undermined by averaging those grades into one cumulative “final” grade. We on the DCLT feel that without standards-based instruction, assessment, *and* reporting, we will be depriving our kids of the benefits of best practice.

In closing, we appreciate the Board seriously considering this controversial and fundamental change in “the way we do things” at MSAD 16. Please know that our belief that this is best for our kids is based not in simple whim or theory, but comes after a long period of research, practice, and reflection.

Thank you,

DCLT