



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
23 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

PENDER MAKIN  
COMMISSIONER

May 5, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair  
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

The purpose of LD 518, Resolve, Directing the Department of Education To Review and Assess Existing Educational Mandates, as amended requires the Department to review all current curricular mandates and the process by which they are established. The Department recommends clarifying the bill language to specifically address preK-12 curricular mandates. More specifically, including language within the bill to specifically require the Department to report back on mandates that impact learning standards in Maine, which include Maine's System of Learning Result (MSLR) and Maine's Early Learning and Development Standards (MELDS). The Department supports this specific effort as an initial step in an important conversation regarding how our State should address curricular mandates impacting teaching and learning now and into the future. The most recent Department review of curricular mandates occurred in 2014.

Earlier this session, Representative Brennan introduced a bill with a similar aim, LD 278, An Act To Establish a Process for the Consideration and Implementation of Changes to Mandated Instruction or Training for Students. Representative Brennan's bill establishes a review committee composed of practicing teachers, school administrators, and content area experts. The review committee will determine whether the curricular content or training for students in any legislative proposal is already addressed in the MSLR, and if not, evaluate the proposal regarding the availability of resources, staff expertise, numbers of courses already required, and the availability of hours of instruction. LD 278 also allows for the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs to hold a work session and vote on the proposed legislation.

It is the responsibility of the Maine Department of Education and the Maine State Legislature to provide State level learning standards. The MSLR is a set of standards, or endpoints, for students. These standards ensure that learning expectations are consistent for all students, regardless of geography. It is the local school boards' responsibility, with the education professionals in their local school districts, to determine the curriculum they will use to ensure their students meet the state level learning standards. Curriculum is the day-to-day set of lessons educators develop within the framework of a school's curriculum to guide students to meet the standards articulated in the MSLR. The Department continues to support the MSLR with its standards, and further continues to support the authority of local school districts to establish curriculum locally.

Starting in 2017, the Department has used a thirteen-step process to ensure that the standards for each content area are reviewed and revised, as needed, on an established timeline and through a consistent process. Since 2017, each of the eight content areas has either completed or is currently undergoing a revision following these thirteen steps. The revision schedule is designed so that each content area is reviewed every five years to help ensure that they continue to be consistent with best practices and new or amended statute. Additional curricular mandates create the potential for starting the standards revision process over. This means that there is potential for the approval of revised standards coinciding with new mandates that would require the revision process to start again. If they were to repeat, then educators would not be given sufficient to acclimate and familiarize themselves with any revisions before potential changes would occur. If educators at the local level are not provided with the time required to implement the standards as a part of curricular updates, then the standards and mandates will not make their way into classroom instruction because the curriculum will remain in the ongoing cycle of awaiting updates aligned to standards that are in a constant review cycle.

While the Department facilitates the revision process of the standards along with developing supporting resources and providing professional development related to the standards, all curricular implementation decisions are made at the local level by each SAU. This responsibility for curriculum is part of Maine's long, proud tradition of local control. Therefore, the Department does not have a process for reviewing, approving, or tracking curriculum that is being developed and used because that is a local responsibility.

The Department looks forward to continued conversations around LD 518 and will be happy to answer any questions during the work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:  
*Joe Schmidt*  
Joe Schmidt

Acting Coordinator of Secondary Education

DocuSigned by:  
*Lee Anne Larsen*  
Lee Anne Larsen

Coordinator of Early Learning

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