

SOUTH PORTLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT  
OVERVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION PLAN  
AUGUST 2007

Through the strategic planning process, the South Portland Board of Education adopted a vision and beliefs for our schools in 1992, which serves even now as the basis for the Comprehensive Education Plan. The mission of the district, “Enriching Lives through Quality Learning for All,” is grounded in the following beliefs:

- *All children are capable of learning*
- *Teaching will reflect the best of what we know through research about how learning occurs*
- *Schools will prepare all students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*
- *The community values quality education*

To support our ongoing work toward this vision, South Portland Schools are guided by a commitment to ongoing improvement and research-based decision making. Through the process of examining data to review our progress toward goals, we will determine cause and effect, examine pertinent research, and make the revisions we need to improve that progress. To ensure a process for school improvement that is thoughtful and sustainable rather than fad-driven and temporary, staff members answer the following questions when planning a change:

- What is the problem that needs to be solved?
- How and by whom will the decision be made regarding whether or not to undertake the change?
- What is the proposed solution?  
(What research supports the proposed solution?)
- What are the anticipated results of the change?
- How will we evaluate the success of the change?
- Do we have the capacity to do the work?
- Who are the stakeholders and how are they involved in the process?

Our four beliefs serve as the framework for the Comprehensive Education Plan; our yearly goals will be developed to operationalize those beliefs; ongoing data examination will be the process by which we will measure our achievement of the goals.

***Belief: All children are capable of learning.***

The Maine Learning Results, the No Child Left Behind Act and the State's requirements support this belief. Research finds that students of low socio-economic status are disproportionately represented in low achievement categories. The district MEA scores have shown progress in closing the achievement gap. However, in order to continue to close this achievement gap, we need to provide additional opportunities for at risk students to receive academic support. At the same time, we need to ensure that no student will be required to relearn already mastered material: Each student needs to be challenged at her/his highest level. This requires a commitment to provide diverse and equitable opportunities for our 3,061 students.

Current evidence of our commitment to equity of opportunity for our students can be found:

- in the community's commitment to a district-wide elementary school renovation project which has brought all our elementary school facilities up to the same standards
- in the district's commitment to locally fund literacy, supporting teachers in elementary schools which do not receive Title I funding to ensure that the lowest readers across the district receive the early support they need, whatever elementary school they might attend
- in the commitment of the Academically Gifted program to screen all second, fifth, and eighth grade students in order to be sure that all students have the same opportunity for their giftedness to be identified and addressed
- in the district's commitment to add the support of teachers specializing in math or literacy to serve students and build capacity in teachers to help them meet the needs of the continuum of learners
- in the district's commitment to provide a strong level of support for students who are English language learners
- in the addition of technology personnel to support technology integration in *all* the district's schools
- in the district's support of teaming ninth grade students to personalize learning and ensure that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum as they transition to high school
- in the increased opportunities for all high school students to access college classes, the increased number of Advanced Placement classes and in the work being done to raise aspirations through whole class administration of the PSAT and sophomore class college visits

*On-going plans to further support this belief:*

Moving every student to achieve the high standards of the Learning Results is a challenge that requires our close examination of current structures in light of research about best practice. One of our areas of study has been the area of access to a rigorous curriculum. Understanding that research does not support tracking, staff members at all levels are exploring flexible grouping alternatives to an inflexible system of tracking.

The high school has been focused on school reform through the ***Great Maine Schools Project***, which identifies significant changes focused on creating opportunities for all 9-12 students to engage in high levels of learning. The high school also collaborates with Southern Maine Community College through the ***Melmac Grant***, which focuses on building student aspirations and developing early college opportunities. Additionally the high school is involved in the second year of the ***Smaller Learning Communities Grant*** which is focused on personalizing learning and ensuring that all student have access to a rigorous curriculum. The focus of all this work is to prepare all graduates for college or further study.

The two middle schools, Mahoney Middle School and Memorial Middle School, have been working together over the past two years to align beliefs, structures and practices toward a shared middle school vision. The work has been centered on developing six key areas:

- Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative and exploratory.
- Multiple learning and teaching approaches that respond to student diversity
- Assessment and evaluation programs that promote quality learning
- Organizational structures that support meaningful relationships and learning
- School-wide efforts and policies that foster health, wellness, and safety
- Multifaceted guidance and support services

Elementary schools are developing flexible groupings which allow students to move in and out of supportive services as needed. Much attention has been given to developing supports for students identified as being “at risk” of not being successful in school. These supports coupled with the identified essential learning at each grade level in each content area help to determine individual student needs.

At all levels, instructional support staff are working closely with general education staff to provide the support that enables students to access our rigorous curriculum. The district is committed to providing staff development to help teachers differentiate curriculum, instruction and assessment in support of this work. Title IIA funds will continue to support this effort. Additionally, the district has targeted resources toward providing additional staff to support teachers and students.

The realignment of two Intervention Strategist positions on staff at the middle schools has been aimed toward supporting teachers in developing literacy strategies and differentiating the curriculum to meet multiple student needs. Additionally, the high school and middle schools have begun to work closely to create a seamless transition for eighth grade students, to identify at risk students early and to provide programming that will keep them engaged in school. At the same time, South Portland Schools are committed more than ever to provide a rigorous program, with challenging opportunities for all. A Transition Academy was implemented in the summer of 2006 to provide additional support for eighth grade students transitioning to ninth grade.

At the elementary schools the four Teachers of the Academically Gifted, the two Library/Media Strategists and the two Literacy Specialists work closely with classroom teachers to differentiate curriculum and instruction to meet the variety of needs present in our classrooms.

Title IA funding from No Child Left Behind supports supplemental services for children who need additional support because of the gaps in their education or their backgrounds. We continue to focus on K-2 literacy, providing a literacy teacher in each elementary school. Having formed a coalition with Scarborough, South Portland Schools will also continue to receive Title III funding to support children for whom English is not the first language spoken at home. That support will focus greatly on staff development of both the ESL teachers and the regular classroom teachers, and will provide additional curriculum materials as well.

A team that included representatives from South Portland's Parks and Recreation Department, the Boys and Girls Club, South Portland's CASA, elementary and middle school administrators and the school district's Director of Transportation, Volunteer Coordinator, Curriculum Coordinator, and Assistant Superintendent wrote and received a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grant which supports extended day and extended year for at risk students in grades two through seven in identified schools. This additional support is based on our recognition that the Learning Results are goals for all students, but some students will need additional time to achieve their high standards. In order to sustain these opportunities for students to access after school programming, the Assistant Superintendent is leading a community/school committee to establish a Community Foundation that would support after school programming, through both community and school opportunities.

***Belief: Teaching will reflect the best of what we know through research about how learning occurs.***

Understanding that quality staff development is critical to operationalizing this belief, South Portland is committed to implementing Maine's Quality Standards

for Training and Development to include continuous improvement, focus on results, organizational alignment, use of research data, and participation.

The district is committed to a culture of Professional Learning Communities, which research supports as the most successful way to leverage improvements in instruction and student achievement. The Professional Learning Leadership Team, comprised of teacher leaders and administration, plan the use of staff development days and early release times to focus on student work and data in order to improve instruction and student achievement. The district's support of an assessment called the Measures of Academic Progress will enable teachers to analyze data in a timely manner and closely watch growth over time. Because time is always limited, teachers and the curriculum director have worked together to revise a schedule for elementary specialists which will provide common time for grade level teachers in each building. Middle school and high school teachers have a team preparation period in addition to their regular preparation period and the discussions during this time focus on looking at data and determining actions to improve student achievement.

To support teacher learning about best practices in order to bring more students to meet the standards of the Learning Results, the district will also provide courses to enhance teachers' understanding of literacy across the content areas. Title IIA of our No Child Left Behind plan and our Per Pupil Professional Development plan will support professional development in the areas of reading across the content areas, information literacy and math.

The Board of Education continues to commit funding for South Portland's involvement in the Casco Bay Educational Alliance. Partnership with the districts in this alliance provides expanded professional development opportunities for staff in targeted areas.

***Belief: Schools will prepare all students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.***

Guidance counselors have been developing a K-12 Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum that includes aspirations and career planning. The high school has instituted a sophomore college visit, and our percentage of students going on to college has increased from 69 per cent in 2003 to 88 per cent in 2007. We know that all students need some further education or training in order to find satisfying careers that will provide a living wage.

Library/media specialists and technology teachers work together on the Information Technology (Info-tech) team to address the critical information literacy skills that our students need. To help teachers incorporate those skills into

their units, they developed a highly successful graduate level class for staff and will continue to provide that course in the coming year.

The high school has been working with Southern Maine Community College and will continue to do so to create dual enrollment opportunities and a seamless transition from South Portland High School to college.

A full time Coordinator of Volunteers and Business Partnerships in the South Portland Schools works with school staff to create opportunities for students to work with mentors in various fields, to job shadow in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and to provide community service opportunities that help students prepare for a future of being contributing members in our democratic society. Our No Child Left Behind plan supports several projects which focus on providing students with “real world” experiences. In partnership with Fairchild Semiconductor, we continue to support the well established Robotics program at the high school with Title V money. This program brings engineers in to work with students as they solve real world engineering problems. Title V has also supported the District Communication project, in which students learn how to film and edit videos which are broadcast on our Public Access Channel.

The district is committed to integrating technology into the curriculum and providing staff with the information and literacy skills they need to help students learn to gather and evaluate information in order to make informed decisions. Title IID of No Child Left Behind will support opportunities for staff to learn skills that will enable them to maximize their integration of technology.

***Belief: The community values quality education.***

The South Portland community has demonstrated its willingness to financially support schooling by supporting a successful referendum designed to renovate or reconstruct the City’s elementary schools to bring them up to the standards of the Skillin School, renovated in 1994. The Board appointed a Secondary Schools Facilities Committee in 2004 to study the three aging secondary and middle schools in order to determine what steps should be taken next to renovate or reconstruct these schools. That community/school committee is currently developing plans for a renovated high school with a community referendum vote anticipated on November 6, 2007. The middle school plans are to be developed over the next few years through the State’s priority school application process.

School Board policies, such as class size, and Personnel Policy Goals, reflect the community’s commitment to quality education. The Collective Bargaining Agreement offers financial incentives for teachers who continue their education, and who remain in the system. Lifelong learning is also encouraged through course reimbursement and in-district courses offered by South Portland staff.

The school district's full time volunteer coordinator oversees a large volunteer program with more than 800 volunteers K-12. The City's librarians work closely with the school district's library coordinator to plan joint activities for the benefit of students, and parents at the elementary schools provide an array of wonderful enrichment opportunities for students. Community members sit on curriculum and building committees, on hiring committees and on the design and advisory teams for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grant. South Portland CASA works closely with the school system to provide education and programming for safe and drug free schools.

South Portland High School and the community of South Portland have been named for the 2006-2007 school year as Community Partners in the Maine Readiness Campaign to institute changes that will enable students to graduate ready to face the challenges of college, career and citizenship. A City Councilor will partner with the high school principal to lead this work.

### ***Mission and Goals:***

To support our work toward the beliefs highlighted above, we continue to reflect each year on our mission and goals. The mission of the South Portland School Department continues to be **"Enriching Lives Through Quality Learning For All."** To enact this mission our goal continues to be Improving Student Achievement. We are focused on two areas in supporting our goal; Communication and Expanding Instructional Practice. In the area of Communication, we are working toward developing a comprehensive standards based reporting system for students, parents, and community that: Identifies Grade Level/Content Area Essential Learning, Aligns Progress/Report Cards with Essential Learning, and Provides opportunities for ongoing communication and feedback. The second area of Expanding Instructional Practice is targeted toward developing precision in literacy instruction across all content areas K-12. The structure we are using to support this work is Professional Learning Communities where teams of teachers will examine data to make instructional decisions to improve student achievement. Finally, our measurement for determining whether or not we are reaching our goal of Improving Student Achievement is our assessment data which include, common course and classroom assessments, Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) data, and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data. The examination of the data continues to inform our progress and determine specific actions toward achievement of our mission and goals.