

Maine's governor signs charter school bill

By Christopher Cousins,
 Bangor Daily News Staff

Maine became the 41st state to allow the creation of publicly funded charter schools last month when Gov. Paul LePage signed into law one of the premier bills of his young administration.

LePage and other charter school advocates gathered for a signing ceremony in the State House and LePage took the opportunity to tout this and other education measures he said represent major steps toward reforming Maine's public schools.

"Charter schools may not be the end-all, be-all for every child but it's another element in the mix of options available to families, parents and kids throughout the state," said LePage. "As we move forward you're going to see us a lot more focused on education from the start of school throughout the higher-education process."

Charter schools are publicly funded but most often privately run. They often focus on a specific topic such as fine arts or natural sciences and must meet state and federal academic standards. They do, however, have more flexibility in curriculum, budgeting and other issues. The voluntary public schools cannot teach religious practices or discriminate against



Maine's governor Paul LePage signed a bill on June 29, 2011, that will allow charter schools in Maine. LePage said Maine is now the 41st state with a charter school law on the books.

students or teachers.

Maine Education Commissioner Steve Bowen told the Bangor Daily News that charter schools in other states have longer school years or school days, heavier community involvement and fewer restrictions on who they can hire for teachers. Whether those provisions will come to be in Maine remains to be seen.

The charter schools bill, which will become law in 90 days from its signing on June 29, 2011, sets up a state commission of seven people — three from the state Board of Education and four Maine residents — which will have the authority to approve up to 10 charter schools in the next 10 years. The bill also allows individual school

boards to create charter schools within their district which would not count toward the commission's 10-school cap. That essentially means there is no cap on the number of public charter schools the measure allows, said Bowen.

Students who choose to attend charter schools will be funded by dollars that follow them from their traditional school system, a provision that was at the core of opposition to the bill from people who worried about already stressed school districts losing precious education dollars. To avoid major impacts on traditional schools, the charter school bill puts limits in the first three years on how many students from a given school can enroll.

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Coordinator's Corner


All effective legislation should reflect the values and needs of society and operate within current and projected budgetary parameters.

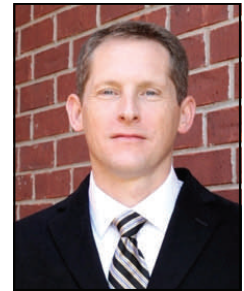
When we apply this perspective to new Troops to Teachers legislation we must first acknowledge that the TTT program is far more than just another transition program for members of our military. The way future legislation is crafted will have a direct and lasting impact on the demographics of our public school teaching force.

What percentage of school teachers do you think should be veterans? At what point in a military career do you think a veteran gains the knowl-

edge and experience that translates to a successful K-12 teaching career? What tools should TTT offices have to assist veterans in obtaining employment? How much monetary assistance should be available, and for what purpose.

There is great reverence in our nation for the selfless service, courage, honor and val-

ues portrayed by our Service members. These are the same traits that are desperately needed in public school systems across our nation. With the recent passage of H.R. 1540 (see below), it is clear that Congress is poised to chart the future course of TTT. The time to act is now. Let your voice be heard. Contact your congressional representatives today! 



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Do you have an idea
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U.S. House passes new TTT legislation

The latest Troops to Teachers (TTT) legislation to pass the U.S. House of Representatives is H.R. 1540. Section 548 of the bill contains legislation that would amend the current TTT law, which was passed in 2002 as part of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The U.S. Senate version of the bill is not yet available. Both the House and Senate need to reconcile differences regarding this legislation *before* it can become law.

A summary of *proposed* program changes under H.R. 1540 is as follows:

1. The responsibility and authority for the operation and administration of the TTT program will be transferred from the Secretary of Education to

the Secretary of Defense.

2. Time-in-service requirements for active duty personnel will be reduced to either four (4) years of continuous active duty service, or a total of at least ten (10) years of active duty service. However, in order to become eligible for TTT the participant must execute a reserve component commitment agreement for a period of not less than three (3) years.

3. The bill will also require that participants submit their registration not later than two (2) years after the date on which the Service member is either retired, separated or released from active duty.

All other program rules appear to remain in affect under



this bill, to include time-in-service requirements for members of the Selected Reserve and the stipend and bonus portion of the program.

The full text of Section 548 of H.R. 1540 can be viewed at www.newenglandttt.org or at the Library of Congress website at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>.



Are you a public school teacher or administrator interested in helping a fellow veteran transition to teaching?

If so, become a Volunteer Mentor for the New England TTT Program!

Visit us at newenglandttt.org and submit a Volunteer Mentor Datasheet

UI&U Offers Flexible Vermont Licensure Programs

If you already have a bachelor's degree and would like to become a licensed public school teacher in Vermont, Union Institute & University (UI&U) offers a unique way to help you achieve your license through a flexible combination of brief weekend residencies and online seminars.

UI&U is approved by the Vermont Department of Education to recommend candidates for licensure in the following areas: Early Childhood Education (birth-Grade 3), Elementary Education (K-6), Art Education (K-12), and at the grade 7-12 level: Social Studies, English, Science and Mathematics.

Vermont has reciprocal agreements with 48 states, so

completing UI&U's Vermont licensure program may license you to teach throughout the country.

The schedule for a typical teacher licensure candidate is as follows:

Term 1 (Sept-Dec): Independent study in Foundations of Education; one weekend a month in Vermont.

Term 2 (Jan-Apr): Independent study in Curriculum; one weekend a month in Vermont.

Term 3 (May-Jun or Jul-Aug): 8-week seminar (face-to-face or online) in Literacy Development.

Term 4 (Sept-Dec): Student teaching, which can be done

in your local school district.

Field experiences in various classrooms are also provided in Terms 1 and 2.

To learn more about how UI&U's Vermont licensure program differs from other teacher preparation programs contact their admissions office at (888) 828-8575 or admissions@myunion.edu.



www.myunion.edu



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Asked after the press conference about whether he sees risks associated with depriving schools of dollars or their highest-performing students, LePage said his motivation is what's best for students.

"This is not about the opposition," he said. "It's not about the school. It's not about the teacher and it's not about the teachers unions. This is about our kids."

LePage said the measure is bigger than just an education issue.

"I think it's going to have a huge impact on developing the future of Maine's economy if we can get charter schools in natural resources, marine resources and agriculture. We have to get back to what we have to work with and what we have right now is those resources."

Among the other victories touted by LePage were \$63 million in increased funding for public schools; a law that allows public schools the latitude to implement innovative methods; the adoption of a "STEM" teaching model that focuses on science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and rollbacks of penalties against school districts that don't comply with the state's school administrative consolidation law.

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Maine's governor Paul LePage discusses education reforms following his signing of a bill on June 29, 2011 that will allow public charter schools in Maine.

To learn more about Maine's new charter school law. Contact the MACS!

MACS
Maine Association for Charter Schools
1018 Depot Street, Union, Maine 04862
207-763-3576; fax: 207-763-4552
info@mainecharterschools.org

In the News

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