

MEA Legislative Letter on University Strategic Plan

January 13, 2005

Dear Legislator:

Trustees of the University of Maine System (UMS) appear intent on implementing a flawed strategic plan that was developed in secret and is now being pursued in spite of opposition by UMS faculty, professional, and support staff. To slow down the process, Senator Libby Mitchell is introducing legislation that would provide for a public review and evaluation of the Trustees' plan. MEA and its UMA affiliates are in support of Senator Mitchell's bill.

Due to the wide gap between the Trustees' plan and reality and their desire to centralize power, we need the Legislature as a check and balance against a runaway Board of Trustees and central administration. If the UMS plan has merit, the Legislature will approve it; if not will benefit from a prompt course correction.

Dr. Leroy Dubeck, a national expert on higher education finance, has issued a scathing analysis of the University's reorganization plan. He reviewed their data and concluded:

- The budget crisis used to justify the massive reorganization is 90% less than they predict.
- There are too few students enrolled in online learning to generate the cost savings predicted.
- The proposed performance-based budget system has been rejected by other universities because it creates cut-throat competition for resources.
- The assumption that Associate's Degree candidates will move to the Community Colleges, but state funding will stay with the University System is wishful thinking.
- Projected savings from the reorganization are doubtful and probably cannot be achieved without adversely affecting service to students and faculty.

Worst of all, the Trustees' plan denies deserving, non-traditional students, many of them poor and female, the opportunity for higher education by eliminating two-year programs when the University of Maine Augusta and University Campus in Bangor are completely overhauled. The theory that these two-year students can be handed over to the Community Colleges without adequate planning fails to recognize the lack of programs, space, and resources that currently exist within those institutions.

MEA asks you to put a halt to the reorganization until all stake holders, including students, faculty, staff and community leaders, have the chance to build a shared vision for Maine's system of higher education that provides for a wise use of state funds while preserving student access and affordability.

Sincerely,

Rob Walker, President