

State proposes cutting sports funding

State funding for school sports and activities such as band and drama clubs is on the chopping block as part of the revised budget proposal outlined last week by the Baldacci administration to help bridge a \$74 million three-year shortfall. Funding for programs would end in the 2008-09 school year.

The proposed cuts in funding for co-curricular activities are designed to save the state \$5.4 million over the 2007-09 biennial budget. Co-curricular activities include chess clubs, yearbook, mock trial, sports and other programs.

“It will affect us significantly,” SAD 22 Superintendent Rick Lyons said Wednesday. “We would obviously be very concerned if the state does not recommend that [co-curricular and extracurricular funding remain] in the EPS formula.”

State revenues are projected at \$34 million less than estimates for the rest of this year, and to fall short by approximately \$20 million for both 2008 and 2009. School leaders all over Maine are beginning to discuss the recent changes to Gov. John Baldacci’s \$6.4 billion biennial budget plan for 2007-09.

There are several education components within Baldacci’s biennial budget plan, including a proposal to reduce the number of school districts, delay a scheduled increase in the EPS funding to 55 percent for a year, as well as the proposed co-curricular cuts.

Under the state’s current EPS formula, all co-curricular activities “are not part of the curriculum, but lend themselves to achieving Maine Learning Results” and are funded in full, David Connerty-Marin spokesman for the Department of Education, said Tuesday. The state funds 10 percent of co-curricular activities, he said.

By proposing the co-curricular cuts, the state is sending a strong message, and it’s the wrong message, Bangor Superintendent Robert Ervin said Wednesday. “Participation is directly related to higher performance in the classroom,” he said. “In my book, we should be doing more - not less.”

In addition to cutting sports and co-curricular subsidies in 2008, the governor’s recent changes to the budget would maintain total education funding at last year’s rate of 53.5 percent, a move estimated to save the state \$17 million.

“The purpose of increasing [state funding] to 55 percent was to reduce the local tax burden,” said Brewer school board member Mark Farley, adding that if residents are asked to pick up the costs of co-curricular activities, their tax burden is bound to increase. Playing sports is “what gets a lot of kids through the [school] day.” Asking local sports booster clubs to absorb the uncovered costs is an unreasonable request.

- By Nok-Noi Hauger, Bangor Daily News, April 13, 2007

Senate panel urged to pass Texas Steroid testing bill

As a competitive bodybuilder, Kevin Collier was in his 20s when he took a cocktail of steroids to make him bigger, stronger and more muscular. Today, at 37, his body can no longer produce enough testosterone on its own, so he must get doctor-approved injections about twice a month. And he fears he will develop liver and heart problems as he gets older. As a fitness consultant who lives in Austin, Collier was among several witnesses to testify Thursday in support of a Senate bill to create mandatory random steroid testing of Texas high school athletes. The bill aims to test tens of thousands students per year, potentially making it the largest high school steroid testing program in the country. The bill would require Texas public school students to agree to the random testing program in order to be eligible to play sports. Positive tests could result in suspension from competition. Sponsored by Sen. Kyle Janek, the bill is one of the top priorities for Republican Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst. The state would pay for testing, about \$4 million per year, removing a key objection from school districts that scuttled testing proposals in previous years. Lawmakers envision testing 22,000 or more students per year. New Jersey already has a state testing program, but it is limited to athletes and teams who advance to the postseason. The Texas program also would require middle school and high school coaches to complete a training program on the dangers of steroid use, which can include dramatic mood swings, heart disease and cancer. Texas had about 733,000 students participate in 1,300 public school sports during the 2005-06 school year, more than any other state. About 130 Texas schools already test for steroids. The Senate panel could vote on the bill early next week. A similar bill is pending in the House. - *by Jim Vertuno, The Dallas Morning News, March 22, 2007*

Legislature signs off on steroid bills

If you are thinking of using steroids, the Legislature has just issued this warning: Don't do it because it is not just your health that might be in jeopardy - it's your dreams of playing sports, too. On Tuesday, the House and the Senate each approved separate bills which, if they become law, would impose random steroid tests for high school athletes, the largest public school testing in the nation. "I think this will make high school athletics safer," Sen. Kyle Janek said earlier in the day of his Senate Bill 8, which the Houston Republican filed on behalf of Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, the leader of the Senate. "Steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs have no place in society, much less in our schools," Dewhurst said in a statement. "Young athletes who want to improve their performance by using these substances are putting their lives at risk, and too often adults and peers are looking the other way." Under the Senate bill, the state would pick up the cost for the testing, about \$4 million a year. But under the House bill, the University Interscholastic League, the state body overseeing high school sports, would pay for the tests. The money would come from the ticket sales at high school football games. Regardless of who foots the bill, the program would test about 22,000 students, or 3 percent of the estimated 733,000 high school students in athletic programs. Those who test positive for the first time would be ineligible to compete for a month. Additional offenses could result in being permanently banned from any sports competition. - *By Enrique Rangel, The Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, April 11, 2007*

Islesboro girls, boys hoop sweep sportsmanship awards

For a school to have both its boys and girls varsity basketball teams earn the sportsmanship award during the same season is almost unheard of. That's exactly what members of the two Islesboro Central School (ICS) Eagles squads learned they had accomplished on Thursday, March 29, at the school's annual winter sports banquet. Robin Cacace, president of Board 11 of the Eastern Maine Board of Basketball Officials, said in the 26 years that the award has been handed out, only five other schools had earned both the boys and girls sportsmanship honors in the same season. "This is a tremendous honor for our school and for our community," said ICS athletic director Dan Ormsby. "To have the highest and third-highest point totals ever is an amazing accomplishment for Islesboro Central School." The Islesboro teams were selected over squads from 31 other Eastern Maine schools. The award takes into consideration the attitude and behaviors of players, coaches, fans, scorekeepers and everyone affiliated with the teams. The banners will soon be displayed. - *By Tim Collins Downer, Village Soup, April 3, 2007*

Congratulations

The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching would like to congratulate the girls and boys basketball teams of Islesboro Central School!

The Eastern Maine Board of Basketball Officials awarded both teams with the Sportsmanship Award, making Islesboro Central School only the six school in history to earn both the girls and boys sportsmanship honor in the same season. Keep up the great work! Congratulations!

Camden Hills explores *Sports Done Right* philosophy

A public information forum addressing the *Sports Done Right* athletic philosophy and how it might blend with Camden Hills Regional High School's current athletic policies will be held on Tuesday, April 24 at 6pm in the Strom Auditorium. Bill Hughes, Camden Hills athletic director, said the CSD *Sports Done Right* Leadership Team will present its plan "for adopting this philosophy to guide our athletic programs here in the Five Towns CSD. This will be an opportunity for the community to ask questions and become informed concerning the *Sports Done Right* philosophy." Maine School Administrative District 5, which includes schools in Rockland, South Thomaston and Owls Head, was one of the first districts in the state to adopt the *Sports Done Right* philosophy. - *Village Soup*, April 6, 2007

Rules lose meaning for teens

Through winning and losing, lunatic parents and street agendas, good sportsmanship and bad, we have always been able to fall back on the comforting notion that playing sports builds character. It's still true, but our comfort zone got a jolt recently from a study of prep athletes' values and ethics. Among other things, the Josephson Institute of Ethics reported that athletes cheat in high school at a higher rate than do non-athletes. More specifically, it said 65 percent of both boys and girls who participate in sports said they cheated in an exam in the last year compared with 60 percent of the total high school population. "It does kind of take you aback," says Illinois High School Association Executive Director Marty Hickman, who later mentioned such positive sports by-products as better grades and attendance and adds, "I'm not willing to throw in the towel just yet." That's perfectly fine with Josephson Institute President Michael Josephson. He sees plenty of good in high school sports and cautions that the report is not a wholesale condemnation of interscholastic athletics or its coaches. It is, however, a shot across the bow of the far too frequent examples of cheating, poor sportsmanship and winning at any cost, and it is aimed directly at those coaches for whom ethics is an afterthought instead of a goal. The report is based on the responses of 5,275 high school athletes to a written survey distributed around the country in 2005 and 2006. The survey did show that many athletes learn positive life skills and values from coaches and are less cynical and less likely to steal than non-athletes. On the other hand, Josephson said, many coaches teach kids to cheat, and too many athletes compete with little regard for fair play and sportsmanship. The survey showed that boys and girls in major team sports seemed less likely to behave well than their counterparts in individual sports. It also revealed that in the athletic realm, girls were less likely than boys to cheat or bend the rules to win. Some of the survey's most interesting findings came in the "sportsmanship and gamesmanship" section, where athletes were presented with various scenarios and asked to say if the conduct was proper, improper or if they were not sure. - *By Barry Temkin, The Chicago Tribune*, April 8, 2007

Welcome

The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching Board of Directors would like to welcome the following school communities to the *Sports Done Right* candidacy process. Thank you for making the commitment to creating a positive and healthy sports experience for the student-athletes in your community.

Cape Elizabeth School Department
MSAD 8 (Vinalhaven)

Trained coaches make sports more fun for kids

Don't let the cute uniforms fool you - youth sports can be fraught with as much pressure, stress and win-at-all-costs mentality as the pro leagues. Eventually, some kids give up. Training the coaches might make a difference.

Adults who are taught to emphasize learning from mistakes, doing one's best and having fun can greatly reduce stress in young athletes, two recently published studies found. They're also more likely to motivate kids toward bigger goals.

"If we view sports as something that's really important in the development of children, then we want to create a climate in which children are going to enjoy sports and develop healthy attitudes and values about sports - creating an environment in which people don't have high levels of fear," said Ronald Smith, psychology professor and director of the clinical psychology program at the University of Washington.

Smith co-wrote the studies, which appeared in the March issue of the *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology* and the February issue of the *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*. About half of the players were coached by men and women who had gone through a 75-minute workshop on teaching athletes how to learn from mistakes, how to define success as doing the best one can and how to enjoy the game. Those adults also had been taught how to provide individual attention and how to encourage players to set personal goals for improvement.

The other players - the control group - were led by coaches who did not attend the workshop and who coached in their usual manner. All athletes had two hour long practices, plus one game per week for 12 weeks.

At the beginning and end of the season, both groups of players filled out questionnaires measuring their sports-related achievement goals, anxiety and feelings about themselves. They were asked if they felt more successful when they were better than other athletes or when they gave their best effort; if they persisted in the face of difficulty; if they felt queasy when they competed; and if they worried about not performing well.

At the conclusion of the study, those in the control group showed an increase in anxiety levels, while the study group's anxiety levels dramatically decreased. Achievement goals changed for the study group; they were more oriented, for example, toward feeling successful when playing better. The control group scored higher on questions that related to ego, such as feeling more successful when the team wins.

Although Smith has studied anxiety and self-esteem as it relates to sports, this is the first time he has examined achievement goals. "Using this incredible vehicle for personal development of children can cut both ways," Smith said. "It can result in very positive psychological consequences - and can unfortunately have negative consequences for kids."

Jim Thompson, founder and executive director of the Palo Alto, Calif.-based Positive Coaching Alliance, which conducts coaching workshops for youth sports programs, said the average youth coach is unlikely to get any training whatsoever. If he or she does, he said, it usually focuses on skills. Many youth coaches are parents with little or no experience, Thompson said. "They feel a lot of pressure to win because of ego. They're not prepared to take advantage of what we call the endless procession of teachable moments that sports provides."

Missing a free throw, for example, doesn't have to be a disaster. "Making it OK for them to miss," he added, "makes it more likely for them to make it."

Overly involved parents also are something a coach "should be prepared to deal with, and promoting this mastery type of approach would alleviate some of that," said Dave Czesniuk, director of operations for the Center for Study of Sport in Society at Northeastern University in Boston, a research, education and advocacy program. "When you hear about coaches subbing in better players against league rules in order to get a victory, clearly they've missed the point of developing athletes and serving as role models."

"The positive side of this," Smith said, "is that it can be fixed when people have the information they need." As for the kids who leave sports, "when they drift out," Smith said, "there's concern about what they'll drift into."

- By Jeannine Stein, *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 2007

Big games for little athletes

No longer content to wait until their children are 5 or, heaven forbid, 8, moms and dads are enrolling their offspring in structured programs at the age of 3 and 4. The Lil Kickers soccer program at the Upland Indoor Sports Arena, where the extremely young soccer players were roaming, even has a class for 18-month-olds.

Such preschool-focused programs - including ones for basketball and T-ball - teach specific skills, general motor development and sometimes concepts such as teamwork - not always an easy lesson for a population whose conversations can consist largely of the word, "Mine!" Coed classes can be found in parks and recreation programs and private sports organizations across the nation and enrollment numbers are growing every year. Many programs even have waiting lists.

The environment is mostly noncompetitive, but the fact that organized sports have infiltrated toddlerhood doesn't sit well with many exercise and child development experts. Graduating to training pants, they say, doesn't necessarily signal a readiness for structured programs with equipment and rules and expectations of victory or failure. Of course physical activity trumps sitting around watching TV, says Michael Bergeron, exercise physiologist and assistant professor at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta. But, he says, sports lessons might not be the best alternative.

"It might seem innocent to say, 'Come on, catch this, run harder,' but they may be trying to get kids to do things they're not capable of doing, and that leads to frustration and anxiety," says Bergeron, who's also chairman of the American College of Sports Medicine's Youth Sports and Health Initiative. "Kids who are further along developmentally look better than those who are not, and kids can start feeling resentment."

Even having parents on the sidelines watching can put undue pressure on very young children, says Bergeron. "Believe me, a kid knows people are watching him miss the ball. It's different in the backyard - you have dad kicking the ball, acting just as goofy as the kid. Structure is pressure, and it leads to frustration if a child isn't ready for that."

Much of what kids need to learn can be found during free play, says Bergeron - running around a playground, exploring the backyard and playing with age-appropriate equipment and toys. When play becomes beset by rules, i.e. don't pick up a soccer ball, don't kick a basketball, kids can lose their natural enthusiasm and willingness to try new things.

Among today's adults, however, many want structure. After all, if they didn't care about specific skills, they could just turn kids loose in the park. For them, structured sports gives their kids the chance to socialize with other kids, and get a leg up on skills seen as increasingly valuable.

An early start

Classes for 3-year-olds are easily found via local parks and recreation programs, as well as through some private programs and facilities. The American Youth Soccer Organization, a nationwide nonprofit group that sponsors soccer programs, knocked its starting age down to 4 years old from 5 years old in 2004. National executive director, Rick Davis, thinks 4-year-olds have the mental and physical capabilities to begin to learn soccer skills. "We're introducing them to the sport in fun ways, from simple motor coordination things like walking around the ball to kicking and shooting and passing. If you were a soccer coach, you wouldn't be sure you were seeing a soccer practice."

Part of the decision to start kids at age 4, says Davis, came from parent demand. "Moms and dads who had kids in the programs would look at their child on the field having a great time," he says, "and sitting next to them is their 4-year-old. They'd wonder why he or she couldn't do similar things. They specifically asked about it." But sports for 3- and 4-year-olds should be very different from sports for older kids.

Parents must make sure that the activities are developmentally appropriate and that the coach can teach a range of skill levels, because children don't progress equally, says Crystal Branta, associate professor of kinesiology at Michigan State University. All 3-year-olds, she points out, can't kick a moving ball - and having to throw and catch a ball could be frustrating for some. When teaching kids, an emphasis should be placed, she says, on the quality of movement: "How the skill is done, where is the body positioned, where does the foot land - some understanding of form and technique."

Greg Payne, a professor of kinesiology at Cal State San Jose, adds that sports for 3- and 4-year-olds shouldn't include competition or pressure. But that's not always easy for overly eager parents. More intense competition for placement on school teams is pushing them to enroll their kids younger, and more often, which can lead to burnout.

- By Jeannine Stein, Los Angeles Times, April 16, 2007

EVENTS

Camden Hills Sports Done Right Public Forum

A local discussion about Sports Done Right and how it will blend with Camden Hills Regional High School's current athletic policies. Public is welcome.

Tuesday, April 24, 2007

6:00 p.m.

Camden Hills Regional High School

Strom Auditorium

Camden, Maine

UMPI Sports Done Right Discussion

Sponsored by the University of Maine at Presque Isle Athletics Department. A discussion with University of Maine at Presque Isle student-athletes. Public is welcome.

Wednesday, May 2, 2007

6:00 p.m.

University of Maine at Presque Isle (UMPI)

Campus Center

Presque Isle, Maine

Sports★Done Right



For more information about the *Sports Done Right* initiative visit
www.sportsdonerightmaine.org or call 1-866-767-8540