

Reporting Part C and B Data to the Public - Maine's Experience

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Sponsored by the OSEP Data - Part C/B Community of Practice

Joy Markowitz: I am Joy Markowitz, from Westat, one of the nine facilitators from the Data – Part C/B Community of Practice. This community of practice is one of six sponsored by the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Communities of practice are a form of technical assistance that creates virtual communities where those interested in a topic—and there is no exclusive membership required—can connect, brainstorm, problem solve, share strategies, etc. related to the topic.

The Data Community of Practice focuses on data collection, data analysis, and use of data for program improvement. You can see that is a very great big umbrella for us. We have tackled a number of issues in our 2-year life, and one of them has been reporting to the public. We have had other teleconferences on this topic, and you can find the information at www.tacomunities.org.

Today we have an opportunity to hear from the state of Maine. In the words of David Stockford, one of our discussants today, we will hear about the wonders of Maine's work on reporting to the public. I might mention that the genesis of this teleconference was at the OSEP Leadership Conference in March of 2005, where the Data Community of Practice had an early bird session. David attended that session and mentioned that Maine was doing some really great things about reporting to the public. He probably thought no one was listening, but we were and we recruited him. So here we are, and David has brought several colleagues with him today.

We have, as I mentioned, David Stockford, the State Director of Special Education in Maine. We have Dean Crocker, Vice President for Programs for the Maine Children's Alliance, who provides leadership for Kids Count in Maine. We also have Susan Savell, Director of Communities for Children and Youth and a member of the senior staff of the Governor's Children's Cabinet; Mark Fairman, Maine Committee on Transition; and Dana Duncan from the Special Services Team.

David Stockford: Colleagues across the country, we look forward to this opportunity for sharing with you some of Maine's practices, successes, and challenges. In Maine, we have tried to make certain that as we keep the public informed, data are put in the context of all the other activities within our state. We know we will appreciate your feedback on some of our efforts as we continue our focus on using data for quality assurance, program improvement, public policy, and engaging the public in the benefits that students and families throughout the state share.

Dean Crocker will share with you what was most useful to us in Maine around making information available to the public—Kids Count—and how the Children's Alliance uses Kids Count to inform public policymakers.

Mark Fairman represents the legislatively established Committee on Transition. We had an experience in the first regular session of our legislature where Mark and his organization were most effective in implementing public policy during a very challenging budget debate.

Dana Duncan of the Department of Special Services team has recently joined the Department. He has had a dramatic impact on our internal use of data. One of his major contributions is helping us present data in a meaningful way to a variety of audiences.

We are also fortunate to have Susan Savell, the Executive Director of the Communities for Children and Youth. I have the privilege of serving with Susan on the senior staff of Governor Baldacci's Children's Cabinet, which is chaired by the first lady, Karen Baldacci. A major program of the Children's Cabinet is Maine Marks—a set of social indicators that reflect the well-being of Maine children, families, and communities. Susan will be sharing that information with you.

We will cover the following topics: the impetus for reporting to the public, the involvement of stakeholders, target audiences, decision making processes, what gets reported, challenges to making data user friendly, positive outcomes of reporting to the public, changes over time, anticipated changes in light of the new Federal requirements, and recommendations for states just beginning the process.

I would like to begin with the impetus for reporting to the public.

A number of factors influence our efforts to share information in a manner that is meaningful to the citizens of our state. Maine has a long and very robust history of data collection and reporting. One of the dramatic impacts on our efforts is the special education child count. Maine has, for many, many years, been one of the top five states in the nation in the percentage of children served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). There are days when we are not happy to have this distinction.

As you may imagine, these data have been questioned annually, particularly about 12 years ago when special education costs were increasing at a rate much higher than the costs for education as a whole. When you look at these data closer, you see that Maine has consistently served nearly twice the national average in the disability category *emotional disturbance*—in Maine we use the term *emotional disability*. This brought increased attention to Maine's definitions, reporting requirements, assessments, and other practices. Reporting data also dramatized, perhaps not appropriately, the variance that existed among schools and across school districts. There was a great concern about the number of students placed outside the state of Maine, as well as concerns about the increasing number of students in the care or custody of other state agencies—when a young person is removed from his/her home—students for whom special education costs are paid by Department of Education.

Reporting data to the public informs and influences policy, provides quality assurance, enhances program efficiency, and, I would highlight, corrects public perceptions of special education. In Maine, we have found the data to be a very powerful tool for recognizing and reinforcing

promising practices, programs, and personnel. Data are also a very powerful tool for resolving disputes or misunderstandings.

Again, I am glad that Dean Crocker is with us today. If you have not had a chance to visit Maine's Kids Count, I want to mention that in the most recent electronic mail from the Council of Chief State School Officers, our Kids Count was brought to the attention of chiefs throughout the nation.

Dean Crocker: We have been doing Kids Count now since 1994; we are in our 11th year. We started as a way to build a new advocacy system for children. Maine Children's Alliance, by the way, does nothing but advocate for children in our state, and publishing Kids Count is one of our largest projects.

One of the things that we realized early on was that providing data is extremely important if we were going to have any impact on public policy. And clearly this is the expectation of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that funds Kids Count. So we set about establishing a committee made up of the people from various state agencies who manage data, particularly data that we wanted to report.

We spent the first year establishing a process for how these data would be collected, analyzed, and published. We now have a fairly automatic process and spend relatively little time talking about it. We do spend some time talking about what data will be used. But the bottom line is that we now publish Kids Count with relatively little trouble.

Maine's Kids Count is not exactly the same as the national Kids Count, but we report the core national data that the national Kids Count project does. Each state is free to choose particular indicators that are meaningful to that state.

Very early on in the process, the governor and the legislature—Republican and Democrat—have welcomed Kids Count with open arms. Our process for release involves the president of our senate and the speaker of the house. The report is released in both houses, and there is a press conference with the governor as the keynote. This press conference is very well attended by the media.

The Children's Alliance has established relationships with all of the state's major newspapers, and at the time of the release, we meet with those editorial boards. As a result, Kids Count is usually covered on the front page of most of the state papers. In addition, it is being used by people who are writing grants and legislators who are using it to make policy points.

One of the Annie E. Casey Foundation goals for Kids Count was to develop a national database that was queryable from anywhere, and in fact it is. The Maine database is also queryable from outside, but you need some permission from us to do it.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Casey Foundation, in partnership with Rutgers University, identified one area in which our data are not

very good—children’s mental health. When the Casey Foundation looked around the country for a system of mental health reporting that might be included in Kids Count, it quickly found out there was no good system. As a result, 3 years ago SAMHSA began issuing grants to all 50 states to develop uniform mental health reporting systems.

At the same time, we went to our Health Access Foundation, the organization established as a result of Blue Cross/Blue Shield going from non-profit to profit. The money that came from that foundation is being used to provide grants to organizations that are helping to improve access and quality of health care. The Health Access Foundation agreed that providing better information to policymakers and administrators about children’s mental health is a very high priority and funded us for a 2-year project. As part of this project, we reached out to agencies like Department of Education, including David and his staff; Public Safety; Health and Human Services; and Corrections. They have all been very willing partners.

We are in the second year of this project and expect to produce the first report in March 2006. As part of this process, we have had a chance to look closely at the Department of Education’s database that has been in existence for a couple of years. We think that Maine is now in an outstanding position to address outcomes in education and mental health. Maine is unique in that it collects all health care claims data—both private and public—whether they are from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Anthem now, or the Medicaid program. Therefore, the potential for assessing information about our children and their outcomes is substantially greater than it has ever been. We think this project is likely to become a national model for working closely with the Casey Foundation and SAMHSA.

One of the other things we do with Kids Count is pick priority areas every year and write white papers. For example, last year we focused on early childhood and provided information to policymakers about the critical steps that Maine needs to take in order to ensure that all of our children have a healthy start. That paper was very well received. It was a follow-up to an earlier Kids Count effort to help the legislature understand the importance of child care and early intervention programs. This effort received serious state support and is now part of the state’s budget. We are hoping to have such an impact in the area of children’s mental health. We have an upcoming report on children’s mental health that focuses on trauma. This is a policy issue that seems to resonate for both the state agencies and the legislature. Our analysis suggests that it is clearly a cross-cutting issue, and there are implications for how we provide mental health services to our children and families.

David Stockford: Thank you Dean. Before I open it up for questions, I want to make one observation that has been very important to us in the state agencies. As Dean indicated, the Children’s Alliance gets broad-based public support, particularly when a Kids Count report is released, and leadership from the legislative and executive branches. A day or two preceding release of the data, the data are embargoed. The Children’s Alliance has been very kind to bring to our attention data that are positive or data that point to the need for a review of our practices. Then we, in the state agencies, have an opportunity to look at additional information we have or initiatives that are addressing those concerns, including programs that have been successful in

regard to those concerns. So we have an advance opportunity to look at what will be reported and highlighted.

Joy Markowitz: I noticed that one of the options on the Kids Count web site is to generate ranked data. Many people bristle at the thought of ranking districts or states. What has been the reaction in Maine to that option?

Dean Crocker: It has been very positive. I think largely because when you look at comparative data in a number of areas, Maine fares very well. For example, our infant mortality rate is close to the top, if not the top now. We have many fewer kids dying than we did a few years ago, and that is a great success. And, as a result of an intensive public health campaign over the last 5 years, we have fewer kids smoking, and our teen pregnancy rate is dropping.

There are obviously some areas where Maine has not been so successful. But the bottom line is that there is enough good news for policymakers to conclude that some of the investments the state has made actually turned out well. I will add, we have been scrupulous about the quality, reliability, and validity of the data that we publish. And, as David indicated, we publish data collaboratively with the various state agencies. There are no surprises. People have come to see ranked data as a tool to identify areas where public policy needs to focus. But I understand that not every state has that experience.

David Stockford: Susan Savell serves with me on the senior staff of the Children’s Cabinet. The Commissioners of the Department of Labor, Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Public Safety meet monthly, and the senior staff meets every week in between to look at what public policies can be coordinated across state agencies. For years now, a major effort of the Children’s Cabinet has been Maine Marks—an indication of the status of children, families, and communities in our state. I have asked Susan to share information about Maine Marks.

Susan Savell: Maine Marks has an exciting history and has had groundbreaking impact, not only in Maine but in some other states as well. About 7 years ago, we decided to join Kids Count in providing data to the public that would hold state agencies accountable for our work. When we began, we made a very critical decision to increase the number of indicators—to increase the types of data that we are tracking. We decided to include not only the traditional kind of data around risk and deficit experiences for children and youth, but also to try to identify and begin to track some what we call “thriving indicators.”

We sat down together as a senior staff and as a cabinet to figure out which indicators we wanted to track. We decided to use goal statements or outcome statements to guide the work of the Cabinet (see <http://www.mainemarks.org/>). Under each one of the goals or vision statements we identified some indicators to which we wanted to hold ourselves accountable. You will notice that some of the indicators are ones that we can easily track. Others are indicators for which we had no data at the time and, in some cases, still do not, but we felt they were really important to

articulate as indicators for the future. An example would be the number of partnerships between state government and local communities or the number of young people who have mentors in their lives. Those are positive indicators on which we have traditionally not gathered data. Over the last couple of years, we have been trying to determine how to gather data so that we are looking at both the positive and the negative dimensions of life for children and families in Maine.

I would also like to share two other projects with which the Children's Cabinet has been involved that relate to Maine Marks and the whole process of trying to identify indicators. Many of our state agencies are doing a number of surveys that gather data directly from young people in order to broaden the kinds of data we have available. The Maine Use of Drug and Alcohol survey is an example. A major focus in the last couple of years has been developing one survey for young people that will really elicit all the kinds of information that we want to be gathering about our youth, including participation in both risk and thriving behaviors.

Another project we have been working on for the last couple of years is one generated out of my office—Communities for Children and Youth. It is a prevention or positive youth development initiative of the Children's Cabinet that we are calling Internet Mapping for Communities. Soon, we will have Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping capability for local communities, with access to data that are important to them. From the beginning of this project, the gathering of data and making data available to local community decision makers has been a key priority of the Children's Cabinet. The goal is to help local citizens understand what is going on in their local community and help them make decisions about prevention programming and policymaking based on data.

Until now, we had data at either the state or county level, but not at the town or community level where local decision makers grapple with what they should be doing to support children and families. The Communities for Children Youth initiative made the commitment early on to get as much data as possible to local communities. Local communities have been asking for the capacity to visually represent what is going on in their community and compare their community to neighboring communities, the county, and other states. We hope to give local communities access to these data by the middle of October. This is another dimension of how we are trying to make data more accessible, more usable, and actually friendlier to local groups of citizens who really care about children and want to develop programming that is really appropriate for their community.

David Stockford: Thank you, Susan. I would just like to highlight that you will see 80 indicators for 2003 on the Maine Marks web site. I have used indicator 22 on that list (children with special education needs entering school), in a very successful manner, to demonstrate the effectiveness of our early intervention system. We have, as the state education agency, the responsibility for children with disabilities ages birth through 5. Those indicator data provide for the public, in a way that they will understand, information about why our program is important for enhancing the chances that children will succeed and learn in school.

For children with special learning related needs, being ready to enter school and to succeed in school partly depends upon having had early intervention and perhaps having ongoing supports for the child and the family in place at the time of school entry. And the data that we share highlights the fact that we have a number of children who, after having been served in early intervention programs, no longer require special education services in kindergarten. In other publications, we have taken per child cost and spread that out over a 12-year period to dramatically demonstrate that the investment certainly has an amazing return when we look at what is going on within our public schools.

Susan Savell: David, that is a perfect example of the kind of thriving indicators that we are trying to track. The reason we have so many indicators on that list is that we want to make much more specific kinds of information available that will be helpful to program developers and policymakers and will provide feedback to those agencies about how well they are doing.

Dean Crocker: The collaboration among the Casey Foundation, SAMHSA, and Rutgers University began with a focus on questions. What would be most helpful to policymakers and citizens when making judgments about the status of our children’s mental health? There was a strong connection to advocacy from a number of parent groups, and the decision was made that this project that SAMHSA was undertaking with the states would focus on indicators that mean something to the general public—as opposed to what we have traditionally used in the mental health world. For example, the things that families hold most important are graduating from high school, obtaining a driver’s license, and working and living independently. We are excited about the prospect of being able to do something like that here in Maine.

Maureen Wheelan: I love the discussion of data in terms of relationships—that in order to collect good data, it was not just a mechanical process. It was a process of establishing relationships with people in state agencies. Disseminating the data was also the result of establishing relationships with different agencies, with the media, etc. You talked about this earlier—how you move people from feeling that data are a “bad mark” to “this is where our work begins.” When those people are the ones who helped collect the data, the data results are not imposed on them—they own the data.

One of our struggles in early intervention is how to measure impact when it is not an easily measured result. For example, if families have the perception that they are more in control, that if problems come up they are more knowledgeable and more skilled, how do we use families’ perceptions when these data are not valued in the same way as other data?

Susan Savell: One of the strategies that we developed through Maine Marks was to partner with a social marketing firm in Maine. This firm helped us do a series of telephone interviews with parents and families throughout the state to get some data on our thriving indicators. That was a very important process because we had never done that before. The firm also surveyed teenagers and parents in households. That was a significant departure or innovation in the way we gathered data. The interviewing was received well and has been an important source of information that was not previously available.

Another issue we have grappled with is helping people understand that these data are not going to sit on a shelf somewhere. As Dean talked about, it is important to develop relationships with the legislature and the policymakers around how data can be used to shape their decision making. We have tried to do this through the Children’s Cabinet and Communities for Children and Youth—helping local citizens and young people understand that these data do not just reveal bad news about them. It is important information that we can use positively as we sit around the table to develop program and policy that will help change their lives for the better.

Sometimes young people must be included in the process of gathering data if they are to understand what we are trying to do. They must become ambassadors to other young people to encourage them take the information gathering process seriously—not to “blow it off,” but to answer the questions honestly. They must understand that they will be part of a team of people who will figure out what to do with the information and how to create new and better programs. The more we engage and involve our stakeholders, including young people, in the process of gathering and using data, the more likely we are to actually create sustainable change.

Maureen Wheelan: The number of children exiting preschool or kindergarten who no longer need special education services is a great way of looking how services help children with disabilities and their families. But there will always be children who need special education services their whole lives and may actually regress. How do we measure progress in a meaningful way for those children and their families?

Susan Savell: It is very important to ask questions such as—Do parents feel supported? Are parents connected to resources and to support networks in the community?

Nyle Robinson: Are you able to share data across Part C and Part B? Are you able to track children, to follow their progress, success, outcomes, and so on over time?

Susan Savell: Last year, Dean and I both served on a work group as our former Department of Mental Health and our former Department of Human Services were engaged in unification. One of the major issues that came up over and over again was merging information or having access to information about clients so that there can be a better sharing of information by several state agencies. We have not solved this problem yet, but I think it is a major priority for the new Department of Health and Human Services. Over the next couple of years, we will be developing new systems that would make that possible.

Dean Crocker: The mental health data project that we are currently involved in is addressing the issue of sharing information in Maine. For example, we have just received approval to transfer Medicaid claims information to our central warehouse that collects health care information from insurance companies. This took a fair amount of time to accomplish, but has finally happened. One of the things we are discovering—that I am sure you have found in your state—is that often data cannot be shared because they are not collected in the same way. We are working on this problem now. We are also beginning to address some of the HIPAA regulations that make it difficult to share data. We think that in the area of Medicaid, we have managed to address those

regulations successfully, but we are still very much in the beginning phase of being able to share information about our clients while guarding privacy and confidentiality.

Susan Savell: It is not a lack of commitment or acknowledgment of the issues or problems; it is that the mechanisms for data sharing have not been created. At our Children’s Cabinet retreat two weeks ago, the commissioners of six of our state agencies made a commitment to make it easier for clients to access all of our agencies. An important piece of this is that data collection systems must be changed so that clients are not asked to report the same data six times for six different agencies. I think there will be a lot of work in this area over the next couple of years.

David Stockford: I want to move on to Mark Fairman, who will give us another perspective on involvement of stakeholders, engagement of the public, and challenges of making data user friendly—particularly to legislators.

Mark Fairman: Thank you. Maine’s Committee on Transition is charged with coordinating transition services for youth across the state. When the legislature established this committee in 1986, it attached funding to support local and regional efforts and do professional development with educators, parent training, and youth leadership development.

The impetus for going to the legislature was a significant budget cut proposed for the whole system that would have affected youth opportunities to become their own leaders, as well as ultimately their post-school outcomes. We engaged a wide variety of stakeholders who offered their personal stories through public testimony and letters to their local legislators. Many of those who wrote and testified were youth who were in school or recent graduates. They described positive experiences resulting from their connections with the transition system that had some role helping them move on to higher education or postsecondary employment. At a later point, we had the opportunity to present and respond to questions at a work session of the Health and Human Services Committee. It was at this session that we had time to share more detailed data and answer specific questions.

We shared Child Count data from the Department of Education on the number of youth with disabilities who would be exiting special education that year, as well as the services they anticipated needing to make a successful transition to higher education, employment, and independent living. Also included was information on other agency services that youth accessed while in school, such as services from Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Health and Human Services and services they received after they left school. We had done a post-school telephone survey with youth on services they were using, school attendance, employment, job satisfaction, driver’s license, etc. All the information was presented in pie and bar graphs to make it more user friendly than words on a piece of paper.

The most powerful piece of data that we shared from our postschool outcome studies was that, compared to the nation, many youth with disabilities in Maine are going on to higher education at a higher rate and are employed at a higher rate. When people heard that information, they said—oh okay, we’re doing some things right. The outcome of sharing that information was that our funding was restored, and we were able to continue to do our work with youth in transition.

I would like to mention some other ways our post-school outcomes data are being used. We engaged roughly 38-40 school systems in gathering the data and provided all superintendents with a copy of the state-level data and some schools with their own data. We are beginning to hear that schools are using these data to examine their programs for both youth with and without disabilities.

Having a driver's license is probably the strongest indicator, at least in our study, of being "successful" at after school. We are beginning to see schools at least talk about using these data to support the re-establishment of drivers' education programs that were cut in the past. Particularly, vocational schools in Maine are considering offering this to their students.

For Maine, the use of transition data resulted in keeping a statewide system that might have been cut. But just as important, we expect to be seeing data used, particularly at the local level, to drive educational programs that will support all students in attaining positive post-school results.

Larry Wexler: I have a comment related to the previous discussion on record sharing. Delaware used its General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) to address the issue of HIPAA versus FERPA requirements and the transfer of records. They retained an attorney who is also a social policy specialist and developed a legal framework for how the records could, in fact, be shared. I encourage folks to contact Jim Lesko (jlesko@doe.k12.de.us or 302-739-4667) for more information about Delaware's work. They did a really nice job, and people in that state are pretty excited about it.

David Stockford: I would like to close with introducing Dana Duncan, who is a recent addition to our staff. I have asked him to highlight issues related to presenting data. In many instances, he has criticized us for trying to present too much data at one time.

Dana Duncan: As a staff, we have spent time understanding the individual data elements needed to meet compliance requirements, to understand the monitoring system, and to plan improvement activities. The goal is to present data in the simplest form such as translating charts with numbers into graphical representations that are more meaningful and show relative change. In some cases, we simply chose to present comparative data. For example, where we have similar activities, elements, or measurements, we compare students with disabilities to their non-disabled peers. The presentation approach is to get the simplest possible kernel of data and present it as visually as possible.

I want to go back to the discussion about sharable data. One of the things Maine has done this past year is assign a unique student identifier to children that they carry with them from Part C to Part B. This gives us the ability to do some longitudinal activities—at least within the educational and educational support systems. We have had discussions with the Department of Health and Human Services and others in the state about using that same unique identifier system across agencies. It is my suspicion that we will have a unique identifier for each child in the state, but I'm not sure when that will be.

In regard to data presentation on our web site, we are beginning to make major modifications that are wrapped around two key principles—one is presenting data that are meaningful to the public, and the second is presenting that data in acceptable form to all individuals. The accessibility rules that we are using apply across all web sites in Maine.

David Stockford: I want to reiterate something that Dana said—be precise in the message you deliver and, quite frankly, the simpler the message, the better it will be understood. Also, it has been very critical for us to identify the audience we are trying to reach. I cannot emphasize enough that how we present the data and particularly data that relate to young people and their families, is important. We have been very successful using data as part of the discussions with agencies, families, and schools. Data allow us to have discussions at a much more meaningful level. Positive data help us recognize and reinforce promising practice, programs, and personnel.

Several of the speakers have mentioned that one of our major efforts is making data available to schools and other agencies so they own them and use them to create the change and take corrective actions.

I would like to highlight something that has been very meaningful for us. This is the active engagement of young people in this process—giving them the opportunity to provide data, as well as participating in decisions regarding what data are collected and how they are collected.

Marsha Brauen: My question has to do with the new requirements under IDEA 2004 to make available to the public data on all the various performance indicators. I am wondering how you might approach that new requirement.

David Stockford: Thank you for the timely question. All of our special services staff spent the morning reviewing the information that was just shared at the Summer Institute (in Washington, DC on August 11-12, 2005). Our staff is looking at how we collect data and how we report data more meaningfully.

Dana Duncan: We do not know yet exactly how we will do this, but we are talking about it. We are in the process of engaging our stakeholders in review and development of the elements of the State Performance Plan (SPP), and we will be sharing various drafts of the plan along the way. We will also post our SPP on our web site. Additionally, we expect to engage the media and several of our state service providers in dissemination of the SPP statewide. The Commissioner is also considering a forum for engagement of all of our superintendents. The general answer is that we will make the SPP as visible to as many people as we can.

Marsha Brauen: What about once you have an Annual Performance Report (APR) based on your SPP and you must report data on all indicators for all the districts in your state. Have you thought about that yet?

Dana Duncan: We will probably use a system similar to what we do with data for NCLB (referring to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*) and AYP (referring to adequate yearly

progress as per NCLB), where we make the data visible both in an announcement form and in an ongoing, continuing, visible display on our web site.

David Stockford: The key is engagement of stakeholders. We have a State Advisory Council that has a membership of 40 people and through this council, we have linkages to nearly every agency, organization, and advisory group across the state. We are trying to make certain that we share the data with them and engage them in helping us report the data—that they take the data to a variety of other audiences.

As Dana said, we will look at how data from NCLB—state assessment data—are shared with the public. Our state education assessment is given in the 4th, 8th, and 11th grades, and we know from speaking with the media that the weekend that information is published is the largest selling newspaper across the state. We have tried to have some representation from the media look at the data, and not just react, so that we are prepared with rationales or information that will help explain the data. The public, in many instances, just compares one school to another.

I have a 10-year-old grandson who just took the 4th-grade assessment. He showed me the notice that his parents received—two pages explaining how he performed, how the children in his school performed, how kids across the state performed, and whether his school was meeting state standards. There is a real focus on getting the information into the hands of families.

Dean Crocker: One of the things that we learned early on is that, collectively, our staff did not have much experience in presenting information effectively to the public. Therefore, we needed to have, at least in consultant form, marketing expertise available. We spend a fair amount of money developing the message for the presentation of data. In the past year or two, we had a conference on child abuse and neglect. For one part of the conference, we brought in media experts to talk about how to educate the public about abuse and neglect. That was a real eye opener for all of the participants and a very good idea.

Susan Savell: I would like to add something on the theme of relationships. It is very important to prepare the public for the data that you are going to release. When we were releasing some sensitive data in the greater Portland area, we went to the newspaper's editorial board and asked it to look at the data, but not to look at the data as another opportunity to criticize the schools, but rather as an opportunity to release data that would generate shared responsibility for what was revealed and stimulate collaborative work toward solutions and change. There was also positive data in that mix, and we were hopeful the media would use those data, too. To our amazement, for the first time, there was literally a headline in the Portland Press Herald that said, "Survey of Hope Released." We were stunned! That was the result of making a very pointed effort to connect with the media and the editorial board before the data were released.

Pat Trohanis: We have found this call very informative. Thank you so much, folks from Maine. I want to follow up with one observation related to pre-planning and dealing with the message. From my experience, there are some additional ways beyond those mentioned. One is building on David's comment about utilizing the State Advisory Panel. Also, the State Interagency Coordinating Council or other key audiences in the state might be contacted before the release of

data. It is important to prepare them for the findings, perhaps by providing interpretations and giving them a heads up so that as the data are spread across the state, these folks could be nodes of communication for the media in terms of localizing the information.

Joy Markowitz: Thank you very much to the folks from Maine—David Stockford, Dean Crocker, Susan Savell, Mark Fairman, and Dana Duncan. This was a great discussion and we appreciate the time that you carved out in your schedules to talk with us today. Have a good day everyone.

Web pages for teleconference:

<http://www.mainemarks.org/>

<http://www.state.me.us/cabinet/>

<http://www.state.me.us/cfc/>

<http://www.state.me.us/education/specedata/index.html>

<http://www.mekids.org/>

<http://www.informe.org/showroom/im4c/>