

SEEDS OF PEACE  
MAINE PROGRAM

# **YOUTH CHARTER FOR THE STATE OF MAINE**

Submitted to Governor Paul LePage, President of the Senate Justin  
Alfond, Speaker of the House Mark W. Eves, Senator Susan Collins,  
Senator Angus King, Representative Michael Michaud, and  
Representative Chellie Pingree

OCTOBER 29, 2013

Throughout 2013, 26 Seeds from the Maine Seeds of Peace program who represent communities across the state came together to revise the original Youth Charter of the State of Maine, which was submitted to Governor John Baldacci in 2003. When these Seeds learned about an opportunity to voice their opinions and make improvements in their community, they travelled great distances in order to come together and revise a document that voices the concerns of Youth of Maine.

The Maine Seeds who contributed to this project are:

Salma Mohamed, 2016, Edward Little High School, Auburn  
Hanna Shibles, 2016, Westbrook High School, Westbrook  
Darius Zagon, 2015, Casco Bay High School, Portland  
Amber Yarn, 2015, Waynflete High School, Portland  
Isabel Szatkowski, 2015, Casco Bay High School, Portland  
Molly LeComte, 2016, Scarborough High School, Scarborough  
Yasmin Ahmed, 2016, Deering High School, Portland  
Morrigan Turner, 2015, South Portland High School, South Portland  
Boniface Kabongo, 2014, Waynflete High School, Portland  
Safia Bashir, 2015, Catherine McAuley High School, Portland  
Kalgaal Issa, 2015, Lewiston High School, Lewiston  
Meredith Roderka, 2014, Dexter Regional High School, Dexter  
Shayna Fogg, 2015, Dexter Regional High School, Dexter  
Qutaiba Hassoon, 2014, Deering High School, Portland  
Ahmed Bani Jameel, 2016, Westbrook High School, Westbrook  
Maryan Isack, 2016, Deering High School, Portland

Mazin Ahmed, 2016, Westbrook High School, Westbrook  
Christian Kabongo, 2016, Waynflete School, Portland  
Salim Salim, 2016, Deering High School, Portland  
Muna Mohamed, 2015, Lewiston High School, Lewiston  
Maryama Mohamud, 2015, Deering High School, Portland  
Mohamed Nur, 2015, Deering High School, Portland  
Jared Dumas, 2014, Lewiston High School, Lewiston  
Paniithida Intharakunha, 2016, Catherine McAuley High School, Portland  
Peter Dutton, 2014, Cheverus High School, Portland  
Nora Schlax, 2015, Lewiston High School, Lewiston

Edited by:

Amber Yarn, 2015, Waynflete High School, Portland  
Paniithida Intharakunha, 2016, Catherine McAuley High School, Portland

With support from:

Timothy P. Wilson, Senior Advisor and Director of the Maine Seeds Program

# DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

We, the Maine Seeds, who represent a variety of nations, religions, and cultures, present the following Youth Charter, which documents the issues currently facing youth in our state.

The Seeds of Peace International program has included young adults in Maine for 13 years. In 2000, the Maine Seeds program was created, bringing together a group of 14 young adults from Portland to discuss ways to unite the diverse city. The Maine Seeds program has grown to include students from Northern, Central, and Southern Maine from a variety of ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Despite racial, ethnic, and religious differences, we have grown together as a family over the past 13 years. As leaders in our communities, we work hard to break down stereotypes and increase acceptance. We run workshops and speak to various school and community centers around the state, creating awareness about issues facing Maine youth—the same issues we address in this Charter.

We have drawn from our personal experiences in drafting this charter, while also building on the issues highlighted by the recent Congressional Delegation. In particular, we focus on concerns relating to growing diversity in the State of Maine. We also consider the importance of keeping youth in the state.

To address the different issues that impact our youth, we have created four Committees: Diversity, Education, Technology, and Media. These committees considered the most important issues facing the Maine youth. As this charter indicates, we are committed to changing Maine's future today.

# STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY

We, the Committee on Diversity, conclude that diversity has the power to either strengthen or divide a population. Unnecessary misunderstandings can be avoided with education, tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect. These are all potential ways to embrace ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, and gender diversity. Diversity, which should be a reason for people to learn about each other and connect through their differences, has become a dividing factor within a community. If diversity is fully embraced in Maine, we anticipate a decline in hate violence and a positive change in the way people view each other, making this state truly, "the way life should be."

## SUPPORTING DIVERSITY IN MAINE

Although Maine has some areas, such as Portland and Lewiston, that have a very diverse population, Maine is considered to be one of the "whitest" states in the country. Those in the state that are not accustomed to diversity are often quick to judge people who look different. Prejudice against Arab-Americans, Somalis, and Muslims living in Maine has been an increasing issue for years. Members of these groups are accused of being terrorists because of how they look. This is no different from treating African-Americans as criminals or Asian-Americans as spies. Both our country and state have long histories of mistreating minorities. Some Mainers have even taken their misunderstanding and hatred to the next level and made Lewiston, with its large Somali population, a target for white supremacist groups.

We believe that our state will be able to overcome these misconceptions if fear and uncertainty are eliminated from our schools, homes, and communities.

By reducing harmful assumptions, we will get closer to the value of "all men are created equal" on which our country is built. When fear is gone, we can truly begin to welcome our new neighbors with kindness and respect, even if they look different, speak a different language, or have different religious beliefs.

## DIVERSITY IN GOVERNMENT

Currently the vast majority of representatives in the state government are Caucasian. The Committee on Diversity believes that the state government must reflect the changing demographics in Maine. We must encourage greater representation of minorities at the local and state level. When a decision about the future of the state is made, very rarely is there input from minority populations. More diversity with regard to race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation is necessary to ensure a fair decision-making process. The government will legislate in a more respectful manner towards racially, religiously, and sexually diverse populations if there are diverse government officials in office. A diverse government generates a wider range of perspectives. Diversity in the government is a way to create a decision making process that is fairer for the entire state population.

## HATE CRIMES AND CIVIL RIGHTS

The Hate Crime Statistics Act (Amended 1996, 28 USC Sec. 534) defines a hate crime as any crime which "shows feasible evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity." This includes crimes of murder, non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, aggravated assault, simple assault, intimidation, arson and destruction, damage or vandalism of property.

Hate crimes have the ability to divide our citizens and distort our society. A lack of understanding and respect for others' beliefs instills intolerance in people. In worst cases, this xenophobia leads to hate crimes.

People express their fear of diversity and change in different ways. No person deserves to be made fun of, harassed, or abused because of who they are or where they are from. Those responsible for hate crimes use slogans, campaigns slurs, and criminal acts to imply that they are the victims and those they fear are the threat. To combat this there needs to be more education and open discussion about diversity in schools. Given the growing diversity of this country, we cannot afford to allow differences like religion, sexual orientation and gender identity to be taboo subjects in school. They must be talked about.

One source of injustice due to bias or stereotypes is the very institution that provides our communities with protection: our law enforcement. Those who join law enforcement may enter it with personal biases. In their position, law enforcers hold a greater responsibility to control their potential biases. These law enforcers do a disservice their communities if and when their personal prejudices overshadow justice. Such situations have a higher potential to occur in areas where there may be a high concentration of minority groups, and the law enforcement lacks knowledge pertaining to the culture of that area. In some cases, law enforcers misuse their authority when racial profiling potential suspects of crimes. As long as law enforcement workers are allowed to racially profile people and make subjective decisions, when they should be making objective decisions based on facts, their approach will extend to the community and people will get the message that it is okay to stereotype and hold biases against groups of those who are different from themselves.

The government can only punish those who perpetrate hate crimes; it cannot tell people how to think or how to conduct themselves. In an effort to avoid prejudice, communities must decide not to judge people based on their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, religion, or national origin. We as a Committee struggle with the question: how do we maintain freedom of speech while protecting individual rights? We struggle to draw the line between keeping one's opinions to oneself to avoid offending others, and supporting a person's freedom of speech and expression. There have been instances where

individuals have taken action due to their unfounded beliefs, and the government views their actions as freedom of speech and expression. We believe that we should hold every individual citizen, no matter their status, to a standard of non-prejudicial or biased point of view.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION

Sexual orientation and gender identity is a topic not usually discussed at schools or at the workplace. This discussion must happen to support sexual and gender diversity, especially among teens who may feel ashamed or embarrassed about who they are. The message that is often received is that being part of the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual) community is an alien concept that should not be embraced or openly discussed. The range of views, both positive and negative, on sexuality and gender norms needs to be respected and understood. Maine Youth in particular need to become more understanding of sexual and gender diversity. The acceptance of sexual and gender orientation becomes more urgent as the cultural diversity of Maine increases. One of the major reasons that sexual and gender diversity has not yet been fully accepted by society is because many do not talk about gay, lesbian, or transgender people. The United States is known to be the "Land of the Free," but we cannot uphold this title so long as we prevent people from embracing who they are.

Couples in same gender relationships are not given the same rights and opportunities as those in heterosexual partnerships. Love between people of the same gender is not illegal, but in the eyes of millions it is taboo. The way people choose to express themselves needs to be embraced by society so that people no longer have to be afraid to declare their differences. Society should be exposed to LGBTQIA issues, people and events at a young age so they can be more educated and inclusive. Issues regarding gender identity, expression and sexual orientation should be included in seminars and health classes. No one wants to ask questions about sex no matter their orientation. Information should be as available as it is to cisgendered,

heterosexual kids. LGBT history should be taught or shown objectively to students. If the school puts up signs for Black history month in February than the school should also put up signs for LGBT history month in October. We shouldn't overlook a minority because they are not represented in our particular community.

Gender neutral bathrooms need to be as accessible and as common as girls/boys bathrooms. It is very important for everyone to have a bathroom—we don't have schools with bathrooms for only for one gender in a co-ed school system, so why do some public and private schools only have gender norm bathrooms? When someone does not have a bathroom that they feel safe and comfortable using they will no longer feel safe at their schools.

Not feeling safe in a place as important as school will have unfortunate consequences for the students in the future. Most schools in our state offer safe spaces that encourage the acceptance of sexuality and gender diversity, and there are pros and cons that follow these programs. On the one hand they provide a safe atmosphere that allows individuals to express their feeling freely, while outreach programs help to diminish homophobia and prejudice. On the other hand, they also give bullies a target. Bullies will find out who is involved with the program one way or another and will taunt them because of it. By limiting participation in such groups, this ensures further segregation through ignorance. It is still very important to have safe place signs and groups in school. If possible every room should have a safe place sign and teachers that do should make it a part of their 'first day of class' routine to explain the importance of such signs voice their support for them. This should be stated even if the kids have heard it a dozen times. It is extremely important for students who identify within the LGBTQIA community to feel safe so that they can perform well in their classes and social lives. It is also important for allies and people not within the LGBTQIA community to realize their importance to making everyone feel safe and welcomed. Leaders of the community have several important roles, such as to encourage understanding of sexual and gender diversity, and expel homophobic views.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allow gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender nonconforming speakers to give presentations that educate the community about sexual/gender diversity.
- Promote education about sexual orientation and gender identity/expression throughout Maine schools—start with the teachers and then they can help educate the students.
- Create a safe and comfortable environment for all students at school (as mandated by the Core Principles in Promising Futures).
- Add gender neutral bathrooms in schools.
- Safe Place stickers.
- Start the conversation about sexuality and gender.
- Allow health classes to include information on safe sex for all orientations and information that goes beyond the gender binary.
- We, the Committee on Diversity, believe stricter punishments for prejudice and hate crimes would better encourage individuals to uphold the civil rights of their fellow neighbors.

# STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

We, the Committee of Education, believe that Maine Youth deserve a quality education and the opportunity to pursue post-secondary options, but face numerous obstacles due to flaws within our education system. Maine Youth should have a say in addressing the faults of our education system.

Many of the school systems in Maine must contend with a lack of adequate funding, which impacts existing programs, especially much-needed ELL (English Language Learner) programs, teacher salaries, and the quality of courses and curriculum. Due to the increase of refugees in Maine, ELL programs are critical. Not only these programs being defunded, but basic classes such as Social Studies and Languages are as well. These classes are the very ones that give Maine youth the assets that will allow us to compete on a global scale.

We, the Committee on Education, propose that the State Department of Education and those responsible for the school system within our state support and make efforts to fund our school's most essential programs, provide thorough guidance on post-secondary education to all students, and purchase only the most necessary technological tools for learning.

## THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

We, the Committee of Education, are concerned about the lack of funds for school budgets statewide. This budget crisis impacts students, teachers, and the administration of Maine schools. Teachers across Maine are severely underpaid, essential curriculum such as Foreign Languages and Social Sciences are being cut, and our budget is being used for the wrong technological resources. In order to make a change and produce students who can compete on a global standard, a school budget more focused on education and curriculum must be created and funds must be evenly distributed.

We, the Committee of Education, propose a new budget plan to fund our schools. We believe in a more education-focused funding for our schools. We understand that too much of school funding is being used for sport facilities and inadequate technology for educational purposes. Today, a student needs two things to attain a global standard of education: technological literacy and a dedicated, capable teacher. We need to focus on funding essential classes such as foreign languages and social sciences, raising teacher salary, and using funds on the right technological tools for education.

In order to compete on a global scale, a person should be literate in at least one other language. Whether we offer the national standard of Spanish and French, or up and coming languages such as Chinese or Arabic, we simply cannot afford to defund literacy in second languages if we want to produce global citizens.

Recently, certain schools around Maine have purchased iPads as the technological aid for educators and students. We, the Committee on Education, being students at these schools, believe these tools lack the capability to be useful. They do not aid students in the comprehension of curriculum. Instead, they inhibit students from completing work in a timely fashion. We, the Committee of Education, propose that funds for technology should be used to issue high school students up-to-date laptops, which allow faster typing and accessibility to more resources.

With regard to funding, school budgeting, and spending, we propose the creation of a budget and spending plan that provides the necessary tools for education, including the essential classes and more.

## **COURSES AND CURRICULUM**

### HISTORY CLASSES

- As Maine becomes more and more diverse, every Mainer will be exposed to different cultures and languages, especially those which are now represented in our population. As a supplement to this, to expose students to new cultures and ideas in our curriculum. We feel that history courses, especially US history, must be adjusted to accurately represent the past, in particular, the contributions of minority groups. Throughout many schools in Maine, students have learned American and European History from sixth grade all the way through high school. We, the Committee on Education, find it important to distinguish propaganda from concrete education. Many times we feel that our course curriculum is rendering bias as a fact. We believe that the history curriculum and textbooks currently do not acknowledge the cultural diversity that makes up the fabric of the United States. We feel that our education must be less Western-focused and celebrate the beauty of all cultures not just Euro-American culture. For example, throughout English and history classes from grade school to high school, we have all been taught about the Jewish Holocaust, some more than many. When the single word 'holocaust' is brought up to students, with the curriculum today, it is believed that the Jewish Holocaust is the only holocaust that has ever occurred. Little do we know of the Rwandan genocide, Armenian genocide, or even the Native American genocide, which very much pertains to the history of our nation. Not acknowledging these key historical events that occurred is only creating narrow-minded and ignorant citizens. The real goal is to create informed citizens and capable of making their own decisions. Immigrants are essentially the backbone that makes the U.S. a strong country. This fact, that our country today was created due to immigration and independence, is not hammered home enough. We do not acknowledge the sacrifices of our ancestors and we do not make the connection between immigration today and immigration then. Consequently, the American educational system must acknowledge their contributions in its courses. In order for the youth of America to grow up without prejudice and discrimination against minorities, our history classes must honor diversity and

differences by giving minority history and culture equal attention in the classroom. Maine youth shall only move forward when our past is accurately taught to us. We believe a better understanding of our roots as a country will allow our youth today to have a better idea of where to lead the country tomorrow.

- When history is taught in a prejudiced way, it promotes and prolongs the cycle of misunderstanding and prejudice. If we are hoping for equality and tolerance throughout the world, country, and state students should have the opportunities to learn the history of other nations, and the history of the U.S. through the eyes of other nations.
- The world that the youth of Maine must prepare for is a world of rapid globalization and intercultural communication, which is why we feel that courses, such as history must extensively include the rest of the modern world. This will allow students to compare and contrast the two, and allow them to respect and acknowledge the cultural diversity that not only makes up the fabric of the United States, but the rest of the world. The hope of equality is the opportunity to learn the history of other countries and the history of our country, the United States, through their eyes.

#### FOREIGN LANGUAGE

- In order to produce citizens that can compete with the rest of the world, we must enforce language education. That means producing at least bilingual citizens. This would apply to native English speakers, mostly those who were born and raised here.
- We, the Committee on Education propose that language education be required at younger ages once students have established enough of an English language basis. As a country we have a tendency to have a somewhat narrow-minded view, in which we don't see the necessity in learning other languages or about other cultures for that matter. But as the global economy grows and the world spins, we must acknowledge the fact that English will not always be the universal language. Already, we are seeing countries such as Singapore initiate proficiency in English and Mandarin Chinese, which has done well for them in terms of growth as a country. Then we see up and coming country's such as

China, India, Brazil and certain Arabic speaking countries that could very well dominate the global economy. In order to combat this and sustain our nation's position as a superpower, we must begin to stress the importance of knowing a second language.

### SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS

- According to the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 19.4% of Maine high school students report having been the target of offensive sexual comments at school or on the way to or from school. Worse than that, 13.6% report having been forced to have unwanted sexual contact and 11.9% of students report having been physically forced to have sexual intercourse. These statistics prove that there are students who have been victimized in our schools and our communities. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, every two minutes someone in the United States is sexually assaulted. These statistics suggest that our current approach—teaching students how to take preventative measures—isn't working. Instead, we also need to teach potential perpetrators about the harms of sexual assault. This would move us away from the approach that assault prevention lies with the victim, and instead informs all students who are capable assault about the impact of sexual assault. We, the Committee of Education, therefore propose that our school system place a stronger emphasis on sexual assault education that stresses the harms of committing assault.

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS (ELL) EDUCATION**

Based on the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and federal court decisions, the Federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has outlined components of a successful program for students learning English.

Programs are to be:

- “Based on a sound education theory—school districts must meet the educational needs of English Learners with an effective, research-based instructional program;
- Adequately supported, with adequate and effective staff and resources, so that the program has a realistic chance of success;

- Periodically evaluated and, if necessary, revised.”

It is based upon these components that we, the students of Maine, believe we have the right to revise and improve the ELL (English Language Learners) program. After all, we have a first-hand experience with the program and we understand the flaws and the improvements necessary to make this a program one in which all participants may graduate with the very asset they were supposed to get out of it: English language proficiency.

The ELL program is vital and important to seeing where a student stands in terms of their ability to communicate in our nation’s dominant language. Presently, the ELL programs offered around schools in Maine are flawed and, in our personal experience and belief, do not accurately measure a student’s English language ability. The criteria for getting into the ELL program needs to be carefully analyzed. In many cases, a child whose parents may be immigrants or refugees may be forced to participate in the ELL program due to their heritage, despite being born and raised here. This, without doubt, is stereotyping, and clearly wrong. Put frankly, this opens the door to allow educators to racially profile their students and place children of a different race in a separate class. Due to this method of selecting students, many children who “wear the face of a typical English speaker” go overlooked and those children could very well not be completely literate in English due to various reasons. These children will continue to move along in our school system due to laws like No Child Left Behind and will graduate without ever being given the essential classes they need. Our goal is to revise the current ELL program, because it is currently ineffective.

ELL students at schools are being bullied because of the fact they are in this program. One of the main reasons for this is their extreme isolation from other classes. This inhibits both sides: not allowing ELL students a social setting to practice their English skills and not allowing other children to interact with these children and experience a new language or culture. ELL students will grow up in our school system without the motivation to learn English because they

wouldn't see it as a necessity. If they took a look around them, there would be 20 other kids who all speak languages other than English and at least two of their closest friends would speak their language. Our school systems don't have the environment that promotes "language immersion." If students don't see the necessity in learning English in order to thrive in the environment around them, they won't see the reason to learn it, or even have the motivation to learn English for that matter.

Teachers, especially in the ELL courses, should be expected to promote understanding of their students' cultures and backgrounds. They shouldn't allow their students to forget about their native tongue or their heritage. Though our nation is called the "melting pot" or "salad bowl" of cultures and people, our school system does not stress the sustainment of one's ancestry enough. It should not only be the job of parents, but teachers to promote knowledge in the area of a student's background and family history. Studies show that Black students who have (and are taught) racial pride do better in school. This is the approach we need to take with all ELL students. ELL teachers must tell their students the importance of continuing the practice of their native languages. There are studies that prove bilingual students have lower dropout rates and higher success in education when they continue to speak their native tongue. We need teachers to show students that putting both languages into practice will actually help them in the long run, so that they don't see their native tongue as a burden to their ability to grow academically or socially. Knowing a second language should be treated as the complete opposite, because it allows the students to grow in different social settings and in their education.

The method in which our ELL programs utilize to measure a student's English proficiency is through an assessment called the ACCESS test. As it stands, we find this method of measurement to be inadequate and we would like to propose better standards for the test, as well as more focus on the test because it plays such an important role in determining the graduation of the student from the program. Many times students will be randomly pulled out



of class to take this assessment, when they have not been informed about the test date. In some cases, students have not been informed about the test at all.

With regard to the current ELL program, we, the Committee on Education, have a proposition for an improved ELL program. Our main goal for the ELL program is to create a program that can be initiated in all schools statewide to create a sort of standard, so that all ELL students in our state will get the best education possible. We envision the ELL program would be a foreign language class for these students, in which the curriculum would deal with all components of language proficiency: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and understanding. It would take on the form of a regular class that would fit into their daily schedule and would not inhibit students from taking higher-level courses in subjects such as math or science. We understand that this class would be like a full language immersion, because students could take what they learn in this class and use it right when they step out the door to go to their next period. These students must be truly integrated with the rest of the school in order to practice their language skills.

We would also like to stress that the ELL program should not be viewed as the same as Special Education or special needs classes for those with learning disabilities. We believe that it is unfair to both parties when some schools place ELL and special needs students in the same program. To address those students who may not be completely competent in English, but were born and raised here, we propose a mandatory high school placement exam for all high schools in which incoming students would take a test and be graded based on an English language common core standard or nationally recognized English standard for students of that age. This, we believe, will help better determine a student's placement for their class selection and will better accommodate each student's needs.

## **GRADUATION**

We, the Committee of Education, find that it is important, throughout the high schools in Maine, that by the students' senior year they have formulated a plan for post-graduation. For a majority of graduates, that next step in their lives is to enroll in college. But those who don't enroll in college may embark on a different route. Whether entering the workforce after high school, enlisting in the our military, or continuing post-secondary education, we feel that it is the job of the State to ensure that Maine youth graduate with a plan that has been developed with the help of experienced guidance counselors.

Once senior year comes around for the students of Maine, the preparation for their adult life should be acknowledged, and the process for what their plans are after high school should be developed. We, the Committee on Education, propose that in order to produce a well thought out post graduation outline it is necessary for each senior to take an evaluation of their interests and have the opportunity to discuss this with their guidance counselor. This will help lean them in the right direction, and may even open their eyes up to new career paths they may have never thought of before.

We find it is important for the Maine Department of Education and the government of the State of Maine to acknowledge and make education a primary priority so that the children of Maine will have promising futures. We represent the youth of Maine that will shape Maine's future and our educational system plays a key role in shaping the type of leaders we will become.

# STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMICS

Technology today is a constantly growing topic in society and influences people every day. Technology has changed things for the better, such as business, media and education. Technology can connect people from all different backgrounds of ethnicity and economic standings. Due to the increase in the need to be technologically literate, we believe that the Maine education system should help students get a step ahead through technological programs.

Students that are more experienced with current technology are more likely to be hired by businesses and are better prepared for the working world. Businesses are constantly searching for workers that are more experienced with current technology and have hurt the chances of many people applying for occupations. Maine has the unique ability at this time to help the residents of the state and prepare them for the business world while the residents are still in school.

## GOALS FOR TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

We believe that technology should be further integrated throughout the Maine school system. The Maine Learning Technology Initiative helped students in middle school gain access to current technology through laptops. We believe that these types of programs should not only be encouraged, but expanded.

We believe that throughout middle school and high school technology should stay constant. There should not be a change in operating systems or in programs unless the new programs are the most recent. We believe that the change in operating systems can hurt the students in their technological learning as they must start from scratch again on the new programs. The consistency is important to furthering the understanding and proficiency with the programs being used.

We also believe that technological courses should be required throughout the student's education. This progression of classes will increase in difficulty, naturally, and will further the understanding of the programs being used and improve their abilities with the programs.

We also believe that programs can and should be developed through virtual high school classes. Programs that are not typically provided by a school can be offered through virtual classes with little expense to the school. These programs can help students improve and further their education with programs that interest the student. These programs are being developed and should be taken advantage of. They provide a unique opportunity for students to learn more about a subject that interests them if the course is not being taught at the school currently.

## HOW WILL THIS AFFECT MAINE

We feel that the increase in technological accessibility will influence not only the students, but their families. We believe that with the ability to take the technology home with them, the students can further explore the systems and teach their parents how to use the programs. This learning that could occur and can be encouraged will not only further the understanding of the student and the parents, but also bring the family closer together and fight the diminishing family values and time spent together.

We also believe that the access to the technology will help the family with financial burdens. Families that might be financially struggling will not be further burdened with the cost of the latest technology. We believe that all students should be able to access the same level of technology regardless of their financial background.

We also believe that the usage of the provided technology at home can help the parents with career preparation. We believe that the learning that can occur in the home can help partners

learn the programs and use them either for their current occupations or they may use these learned skills to acquire a new occupation.

We conceive that businesses in the future will be more attracted to Maine as there will be more people in the state that are able to use the programs they require. Often businesses will consider whether or not they must train an applicant or not before they hire them. If the next generation were already able to use the programs of the future from their primary education then businesses will find that very appealing.

## HOW CAN THE STATE PROVIDE FOR THESE PROGRAMS

We are confident that financial matters should not impede the passage of these provisions. We think there are multiple ways that the money for these programs can be found in the budget. We find that curriculum changes may have to be made on local levels, but that influence whether the programs are created or not.

We have found a multitude of ways that the money can be found for the programs we have described. We believe that the residents of Maine may be willing to increase their taxes, whether it be on property or income, to improve the education of the next generation. Maine residents have consistently over the years been against tax increases for a multitude of reasons, however we consider this to be a righteous cause and one that the people of Maine would wholly support.

If tax increases are a limiting factor to these arrangements then federal block grants may be found. Federal block grants are designed to provide money for state programs without large economic burdens on the state. There are sure to be grants that have provisions for developments such as these.

Another method for fiscal burden avoidance would be to reconsider the Maine education budget. There are multiple programs that are not quite as essential or perhaps do not have as much potential. If money can be reevaluated from other places, then it would not at all be wasted with the developments we are proposing.

If money is still restrictive, we propose competitive bidding for the contracts from the government. This is seen as a last resort, however, as the price war may result in the lesser of the companies earning the contracts. The companies may not be able to provide the best technology for the price and that will result in a less effective education of the programs.

Private funding should in no way be discouraged, but simultaneously should in no way influence the programs and how they are run. This is a state program and should not be influenced by outside corporations or interests.

## STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON MEDIA

The media has the ability to shape the thoughts and ideas of society, spread information, and when presented properly, increase understanding and tolerance. However, the media can also act as a divisive instrument that produces conflict and spreads hatred.

The majority of media outlets are profit-oriented and aimed at attracting consumers, rather than providing factual new reporting. Problems arise when the media depicts violence as entertainment and sensationalizes stories. For example, during the 2013 attack at the Westgate Mall in Kenya, certain media outlets in Maine provided false information, which created negative views towards the local Somali community.

The public needs to have faith that the news it receives reliable, credible and unbiased. The news should not make attracting viewers a higher priority over reporting the facts.

On September 21, 2013, Channel 13 WGME and other news outlets erroneously linked the Westgate Mall shooting in Kenya to the Somali community here in Maine. The population of Somali refugees in Maine has not been especially favored, and this publication of false information has not helped.

On September 27, the *Portland Press Herald* reported on meetings held in Washington attended by Senator Angus King, the FBI, and the National Counterterrorism Center ("No Signs Tying Mainers to Attacks at Kenya Mall"). The article reiterates that the Islamic community in Maine had no ties to the Kenya shooting. Had the article been given more prominence, it might have done more to redeem the Somali community in Maine in the eyes of the public.

A *Boston Globe* article about the influx of Somali immigrants negatively depicts Lewiston, its residents, and the Somali population. Rather than present how Lewiston has taken steps towards increasing tolerance, the journalist chose to focus on the negative aspects of the situation. The opening line of the *Boston Globe* article reads: "Just down (a) scruffy Lisbon Street from Frenchy's Barber Shop, behind threadbare sheets that serve as drooping curtains, a tired city's newest immigrants gather in their dilapidated house of worship."

The media often fails to inform readers about the importance of cultural diversity, and portrays immigrants negatively. If media was to be more objective and stress the importance of hearing many perspectives, minorities would not be viewed in such a poor light.

In Maine, the diversity in the media field is almost nonexistent; many minority groups including Africans, Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Eastern immigrants aren't represented in the media. The Committee on Media, believes the solution is simple: the media in Maine should make an effort to hire reporters from different cultural backgrounds to expand the audience's worldview and decrease the false light of negativity on minority groups.

## CYBER BULLYING

Cyber bullying is not only a state issue, but a nationwide problem. When the general public used to think of bullying, Internet was not related. Today, the Internet allows a person to be a bully anytime and anywhere. The basic definition for bullying is when one harasses another individual in order to intimidate the victim. According to iSafe inc., 42% of students nationwide have been bullied on the Internet. At first it began in school, then the world continued to progress and with the creation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. people began to abuse their first amendment right. We, the Committee on Media, believe that our laws have not caught up to technology.

In a recent situation in Orono, on October 19, 2013, a 17-year old former Orono High student was sentenced in court for terrorizing another teenage girl through cyber bullying. She used various social networks to bully the victim. The former Orono High student used explicit and vulgar words through Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The victim frequently refused to go to high school events because she was afraid of the former student. She later transferred to Scarborough in order to get away from the bully.

Since the incident, the former Orono High student is not allowed to use her cellphone for social media networks. Cyber-bullying incidents similar to this case can be prevented, however due to the fact that it is commonly done among children and adolescents, it is hard to have laws in place that can provide consequences for their actions. In serious cases, cyber-bullying has resulted in suicide or manslaughter, and courts have ruled in favor of the victims' families. However, too many times has a child's life been taken away without justice being served.

In regards to the prevention of cyber-bullying, we, the Committee on Media, propose that this issue be addressed when lawmakers and government officials convene. They should support research on this issue: the terms of consequences for cyber bullying, what to do when a



person of legal age is the perpetrator, and how to address cases that escalate to suicide. We, the Committee on the Media, recognize this issue cannot be addressed solely through legislation, and we support efforts to raise awareness among students about the effects of cyber-bullying at a young age as a preventative measure, as well as promoting the education of teachers on cyber bullying so they are able to notice signs of bullying and offer help.

## WORKS CITED

Gagnon, Dawn. "Former Orono High Student Charged in Cyberbullying Case; Target and Family Speak out." *Bangor Daily News RSS*. N.p., 15 Nov. 2012. Web. 22 Oct. 2013.  
Miller, Kevan. "No Signs Tying Mainers to Attacks at Kenya Mall." *Portland Press Herald*. Portland Press Herald, 27, Sept. 2013. Web. 22 Oct. 2013.]