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## **An Act To Achieve Maine's High School Graduation Goal**

**Emergency preamble. Whereas,** acts and resolves of the Legislature do not become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

**Whereas,** 22% of Maine high school students do not complete high school in 4 years; and

**Whereas,** the State has recently established the goal of a 90% high school completion rate by 2016; and

**Whereas,** in school year 2008-2009, 2,162 students dropped out of high school; and

**Whereas,** in school year 2008-2009, 7% of young people between the ages of 16 and 19 were not attending school and were not employed; and

**Whereas,** in school year 2008-2009, 1,446 girls and young women, between 10 and 19 years of age, gave birth; and

**Whereas,** Maine's percentage of college graduates lags 7% behind the New England average, thereby negatively affecting workforce readiness; and

**Whereas,** in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now, therefore,

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

**Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA c. 228** is enacted to read:

### **CHAPTER 228**

#### **AT-RISK STUDENT GRANT PROGRAM**

##### **§ 6971. Program established**

**1. Program established.** The At-risk Student Grant Program is established under the administration of the commissioner as set out in this chapter.

**2. Definitions.** As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "At-risk student" means an elementary student or secondary student who is at risk of failing or dropping out of a regular public school program as determined in accordance with criteria established in rules by the commissioner.

B. "Partner" means a Maine nonprofit corporation that provides services to at-risk students and delivers those services pursuant to an agreement with a recipient as described in that recipient's grant application.

C. "Recipient" means a school administrative unit that has been awarded a grant under this chapter.

D. "Rural district" means a school administrative unit that qualifies as a rural district under criteria in rules adopted by the commissioner.

**3. Grant-making authority.** The commissioner may award individual grants of not more than \$500,000 each to one or more school administrative units to fund programs designed specifically and intended exclusively for the support of at-risk students. Programs that include services delivered by a partner are preferred, but school administrative units may apply without having previously made an agreement with a partner. Grants for programs that do not include a residential programming option may not receive funding that exceeds 1 1/2 times the statewide average per-pupil expenditure.

## **§ 6972. Program criteria**

**1. Requirements.** To qualify for a grant under this chapter, an application must propose a program that meets the following requirements:

A. The program serves a school administrative unit or units having a high percentage of dropouts or a lack of appropriate programs for at-risk students, or both;

B. The program identifies a process for quality control and outcome measures; and

C. The program enhances or advances efforts of a school administrative unit to accomplish the goals set out in chapter 211, subchapter 1B with respect to high school graduation rates and suspension and expulsion policies.

**2. Selection.** The commissioner shall award a grant to a program that meets the requirements of subsection 1 based on the degree to which it meets the following additional criteria, taking into account the distribution of grants required by subsection 3:

A. The program includes personal learning plans;

B. The program includes a partner;

C. The program contains a strong plan for identifying and recruiting students into the program;

D. The program focuses on youth who show interest in completing a high school program;

E. The program includes an option for residential programming for those students best served by that option;

F. The program makes available internship and apprenticeship opportunities;

G. The program reflects recommendations from local youth councils and the advisory committee on truancy, dropouts and alternative education established pursuant to section 5152;

H. The program is based on or provides for input from a local alternative program and dropout prevention committee; and

I. The program includes plans for regional collaboration.

**3. Application process; distribution of awards.** The commissioner shall establish reasonable deadlines each year for an initial application and award cycle, followed by a supplemental award cycle if all funds available are not awarded in the initial cycle. The commissioner shall make the application process as simple as possible and one that encourages participation by and provides grants to a wide spectrum of eligible schools. The commissioner shall reserve 40% of the funds determined to be available in each initial application and award cycle for grants to rural districts. Any portion of the funds reserved for rural districts but not awarded in the initial application and award cycle because applications meeting the requirements do not qualify for the total reserved amount may be awarded to any district during a supplemental award cycle.

### **§ 6973. Available funds**

The commissioner may expend and disburse funds to carry out the purposes of this chapter to the extent that the commissioner identifies existing resources that are available. The commissioner may identify and expend for purposes of this chapter any portion of the amount available for services to state agency clients that the commissioner determines will exceed the reasonably projected amount required to support the expected number of state agency clients in a school year. This expected number of clients must be determined in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services.

### **§ 6974. Program review**

The commissioner must, on an annual basis, consult with an audit and review board appointed by the commissioner and consisting of superintendents and members of local youth councils to review the program.

**Emergency clause.** In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.

## **SUMMARY**

This bill establishes the At-risk Student Grant Program, to be administered by the Commissioner of Education, to improve the ability of school districts to reduce dropout rates by creating programs, preferably with nonprofit partners, to provide services to at-risk youth that may include an option for residential services and will further the State's goal of increasing high school graduation rates. The program is funded from available resources identified by the commissioner.