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Some see LD 1666 merely as giving school districts a way to opt out of the proficiency based diploma law, but I am hopeful that this bill will open the door to great learning experiences for students. The implementation of the original proficiency bill moved us in the opposite direction of what I intended when I signed it. I still believe that it's important for all kids to leave high school having met the standards in all eight content areas, but we need to rethink how we achieve that goal. In some pockets throughout the state we have seen glimpses of what a standards-based system could mean. High school students meeting math and science standards in their CTE programs is an example. But CTEs are not the only place applied learning can happen.

A standards-based education affords a lot of opportunities for an engaging education, across all disciplines. Ensuring that this is the type of education we implement should continue to be the focus of the Maine Department of Education. This bill supports that effort. It is not perfect, and I do have concerns about implications and unintended consequences. But despite its imperfections it does allow for flexibility and innovation.

We need our graduates to be better prepared for their futures. We need our graduates to want to stay in Maine and contribute to our growing economy. We have learned that academic learning standards can pave the way to an integrated education, pairing classroom experiences with real-world, hands on experiences. We shouldn't be waiting until students have checked off all the boxes on standards before they can start applying them in life and work. Life and work should be an integrated part of school. The benefit of learning standards is that they can be applied in infinite contexts. This bill is a chance to take what we've learned and make that promise a reality.

I hope LD 1666 is not just an effort to undo something; I hope it is a chance for the Maine Department of Education to continue moving forward in helping Maine schools implement best practices for student learning.



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