TALKING POINTS

The law has not worked.

- Despite a goal of reducing Maine's 290 districts to 80 by July 1 of this year, 218 remain. In more than 100 communities, voters simply rejected consolidation despite being threatened with penalties in the form of reduced state aid.
- Another 43 districts were given a pass by the Department of Education even though more than half were under the so-called optimum size of 2,500 and several are just at or below the 1,200 enrollment minimum outlined in the law.
- The Legislature let another 12 districts off the hook, declaring them inland islands, in addition to eight real islands and the three Maine Indian Education schools that were exempt as part of the original legislation.
- Of the 26 new districts that were formed through consolidation, 13 are under 2,000 students and one was declared a Regional School Unit even though it merged with no one.

The law is not fair.

- It disproportionally affects rural Maine, while urban areas were not required to merge with anyone
- There are 66 districts, representing 55 percent of the state's enrollment, that were not forced to consolidate because of size, location or other special dispensations granted by the Department of Education.
- Communities that voted against consolidation face $5 million in penalties next year for exercising their rights at the ballot box – an unethical practice in a democracy.

The law has not saved any money; it has cost money.

- Mandatory consolidation already has cost the state an estimated $4 million to enforce, but the Department of Education says it's too soon to quantify any real savings at the local level.
- The news gets worse long-term since the law requires that teacher contracts in merging districts be merged as well, with a shared pay scale. That means lower salaries will be brought up to match the higher ones and the impact is hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars per district.
- There also has been a cost shift onto communities that have merged. In new RSU 5, for example, residents in Pownal will see their taxes increase by 25 percent and in Durham by 19 percent, while Freeport's taxes will go down just over 1 percent.

The law is too rigid.

- There is no legal way communities can get out of a merged district once they are in one, even if the arrangement is not working for the citizens and students of that community.

- The law does not recognize other forms of cooperation among school districts as a legal alternative to mandated consolidation
- This rigid mandate overlooks cooperatives and regional sharing that could actually save more money than full-blown consolidation.
- There is a law on the books, “An Act to Encourage Cooperation among School Administrative Units” that outlines 14 areas where school districts can pool their resources to more efficiently provide services, from special education to pre-school programs, and back-office functions like purchasing, accounting and designing bus routes.
- Why aren’t we pushing voluntary cooperation instead of pursuing a failed mandate?