

## Bangor on the MEA: Strong, Getting Stronger

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As expected, Bangor fourth, eighth and eleventh graders continue to perform strongly on the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA). Reportedly aligned with the Maine Learning Results (MLR), the assessment covers the content areas of English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Social Studies, Health and the Visual Fine Arts.

In 1998-1999, a "new" MEA reintroduced the use of multiple-choice questions due to the impracticality of effectively assessing the broad scope of the MLR solely using short answer and essay test items. The assessment also moved away from reporting the student results in a way that allows for school district

**TABLE 1:**  
**Bangor MEA Results measured against MLR**

	Academic Year		
	00-01	99-00	98-99
<b>Reading</b>			
Exceeds the Standards	2%	6%	5%
Meets the Standards	62	56	47
Partially Meets the Standards	33	36	43
Does Not Meet the Standards	4	3	5
<b>Writing</b>			
Exceeds the Standards	2	5	0
Meets the Standards	46	42	30
Partially Meets the Standards	45	47	56
Does Not Meet the Standards	7	5	13

comparison, instead measuring performance against standards established in the MLR. The result is a scale from 501 to 580 divided into four equal parts: Exceeds Standards, Meets Standards, Partially Meets Standards and Does Not Meet Standards (see Table 1).

The scaled score range, 501 to 580, causes an interesting phenomenon when trying to understand what the scores actually mean. As an example, when looking at the MEA scores from 1999-2000, Bangor High School's average scaled score in mathematics was 533. This score indicates that BHS students, on average, partially meet Maine's math standard (the partially meets range is 521-540). Knowing that the state's average for that year was 528 helps us to understand that BHS students performed above the state's average. However, if you convert the scaled score into a percentile, it results in a score of 92. In other words, with a scaled score of 533, which only partially meets the standard, BHS students performed better than 92% of the students in schools across the State of Maine on this portion of the MEA. The corresponding state average for that same test was 68 percent. Amazingly, a five-point difference in scaled scores becomes a 24-point difference in percentiles!

Table 2 assures us that Bangor's students continue to outperform the state in general; however, with the MEA being a standards-based test aligned to the MLR, the larger question is how many Bangor students meet or exceed the standards. For this comparison, the percentage of students who fall into either the "meets" or "exceeds" categories are added together to provide us with a picture of how our students do against the state standards. The graphs of Bangor

**TABLE 2**  
**Bangor MEA Results vs. State Averages: Grade 11**

	<i>Academic Year</i>		
	<b>00-01</b>	<b>99-00</b>	<b>98-99</b>
<b>Reading</b>			
<i>At or Above Proficient – State</i>	52%	47%	51%
<i>At or Above Proficient – BSD</i>	64	62	52
<i>At or Above Excellent – State</i>	2	3	3
<i>At or Above Excellent – BSD</i>	2	6	5
<b>Writing</b>			
<i>At or Above Proficient – State</i>	41	35	31
<i>At or Above Proficient – BSD</i>	48	47	30
<i>At or Above Excellent - State</i>	1	3	1
<i>At or Above Excellent - BSD</i>	2	5	0

grade level performance (Table 2) provide a comparison of this data against the state, demonstrating that in almost all subject areas, an higher percentage of Bangor students meet or exceed the standards than other students in the state. Because we look at this data in a 3-year time frame, it is clear that more and more students are on

their way to meeting the state standards in the Bangor school system; in fact, the numbers also suggest that our improvement on the MEA outpaces that of the rest of the state.

With MLR implementation barely underway, this new MEA was administered three years ago with predictable results. In Year One approximately 80% of Maine students fell into the "partially" or "did not meet" categories on the mathematics exam. Year Two test results were similar, creating questions of test validity and pushing local and state reforms focused on curricular and programmatic alignment with the MLR statewide. Some systems have now gone as far as to adopt curriculums that are based solely on the MLR. While the Bangor School Department pays attention to how the MLR matches our curriculum, the MLR do not drive what we do with students. Our standards are higher than those set by the MLR, and because we use a variety of assessments, we can say with confidence that Bangor students perform extremely well by many measures.

Regardless of the source of the data, it is repeatedly demonstrated that Bangor students finish their K-12 experience with high academic achievement. While it is true that not many students in the State of Maine meet or exceed the standards of the MEA, this poor performance is likely the result of the administration of an assessment based upon content-standards barely addressed by school systems. While the Department of Education has attempted to cover the shortcomings of state-wide student performance by making "partially meets" acceptable, it clearly falls below the mark. The data does indicates that Bangor schools had a higher percentage of students at all levels, and in all subjects, in the "exceeds" and "meets the standard" categories than did the rest of state. Of equal note are the comparatively few Bangor students in the "does not meet" category. But more importantly, the performance of Bangor students is showing upward trends as the Bangor School Department meets the challenges presented by MLR implementation through high academic standards.