

Maine's Aspirations Movement: Reaching Out to Youth

BILL PREBLE,¹ PATRICK PHILLIPS,² AND HEIDI MCGINLEY³

As research and scholarship across the country suggests, America's youth are in crisis. Changing family structures, ineffective educational practices and an increasingly self-destructive youth culture are resulting in lower educational outcomes. This article describes the state of Maine's response to this national problem through the development of two programs, the Maine Aspirations Compact and University of Maine Aspirations Project, developed by civic, educational and business leaders to raise the expectations of Maine youth.

INTRODUCTION

The 1980's will be remembered as a time of prosperity, strength, and opportunity . . . for some. But it will also be remembered as a time when many Americans began to turn their attention to the unprecedented problems facing America's youth and the growing crisis confronting American families.

A variety of national reports have surfaced recently documenting a crisis of opportunity, aspiration, and hope among adolescents and young families. One such report, entitled "Youth and America's Future: The Forgotten Half," was published in 1988 by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. The Forgotten Half documents the troubled lives and bleak futures of America's 20 million non-college bound young people. It illustrates the difficulties of adolescence, complicated by rapid social and economic change, and suggests that we are creating a bimodal society in which many young people are receiving the adult assistance, encouragement and support necessary to cope with such changes, while millions are not (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988).

In another study of adolescent experience and opinion, high school students report spending less than 10% of their time interacting in a personal way with adults. Students reported being engaged in conversations of a personal nature with teachers less than six-tenths of a percent of the time. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1983) The greatest fear reported by most young people is not death or AIDS; it is the fear that their parents will divorce. Children apparently are aware of the economic and emotional stress of families torn apart by divorce and poverty.

Yet another report, "Children in Need: Investment Strategies for the Educationally Disadvantaged" published by the Committee for Economic Development (CED), a group of top corporate executives and higher education

representatives, concludes that the nation can ill-afford to waste the potential of its young people. The report cites the need for dramatic educational reform to address the nearly one-fifth of America's children now living in poverty. It reports that nearly one-third of our children face educational failure and lifelong dependency: this year alone, one million marginally literate young people will drop out of high school. They will be deficient in basic skills and "virtually unemployable." CED recommends a variety of strategies to meet the needs of what they call "the growing educational underclass." It calls on the business community to take the lead in forming "the coalitions of business, education, parent organizations, civic groups, and all levels of government that are required to meet this challenge." (Committee for Economic Development, 1988).

These reports and their grim statistics represent only a fraction of the research and scholarship which has documented America's youth crisis. That these conditions exist in a nation where people live in relative "affluence"—speaking in historical and comparative global terms—begs the questions, "what has gone wrong?" and "what can be done to turn the tide in favor of American families and children? As the nation's economy continues to change, as families continue to weaken, and as more and more children fail to fulfill their potential, leaders from every sector of American society are increasing their efforts to support children. One such effort is the Maine aspirations movement.

MAINE'S ASPIRATIONS MOVEMENT

Maine, and especially its central and northern regions, is poor, rural, and isolated. The state is larger than all other New England states combined and ranks last among them in every educational, economic and social/cultural category. In general, while education has been highly

¹Director, University of Maine Aspirations Project, Orono

²Coordinator of Special Projects, Maine School Management Association, Augusta

³Coordinator, Aspirations Compact, Department of Education and Cultural Services, Augusta

valued, it has not been well supported. Maine ranks 40th in state appropriations for higher education. The state's school teachers are among the lowest paid, ranking 40th nationally (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1987).

Educational achievement is lower in rural areas than suburban or urban areas, but generally as a result of lower socio-economic status of the students (Coladarci and McIntire, 1988; McIntire and Marion, 1989). More than 20% of Maine residents over 18 years of age have not completed high school and more than 92% of them do not have a college degree (Statistical Abstract, 1986). Recent indicators of student performance and academic achievement indicate that gains necessary to keep pace with hanging expectations and needs of today's economy are not occurring (Baker, 1989).

Research on the academic, vocational and lifestyle aspirations of rural youth reveals the following:

- Rural youth value their jobs more and their education less than urban or suburban youth.
- Rural youth do not aspire to post-secondary educational opportunities as frequently as urban or suburban youth.
- Rural students are not as confident as urban or suburban students in their abilities to complete a college education.
- Rural parents are much less supportive of full-time college for their students than their urban or suburban counterparts.
- Rural youth report more often than urban youth that their guidance counselors and teachers do not think they should go to college (Cobb, et al., 1985).

This failure to achieve and aspire to post-secondary education, particularly among Maine's rural population is occurring precisely at a time when Maine's economy is changing rapidly and when every indication is that students will need increased knowledge and skills to participate successfully in the work force. In 1980, Maine natives comprised approximately three quarters of the Maine labor force, but they comprised only 50% of those in the labor force holding bachelor's degrees. Further, they comprised less than 15% of all upper-level managers and professional staff (Barringer, 1984). According to Maine economists, by 1995 three-fourths of the jobs in Maine will require some form of post-secondary education and 40% of them will require mathematical, scientific and technological proficiency beyond high school standards. In addition, students with only a high school diploma can expect to earn an average of 25% less throughout their lifetimes than the earlier generation (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988).

Like their counterparts across the nation, Maine's children are also facing the pressures of changing family structures, ineffective educational practices, and an increasingly self-destructive youth culture. A report published in January, 1989, by the Commission on Primary Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency shows that in an average year:

- 10,000 Maine juveniles are arrested (1,000 for Operating Under the Influence)

- 5,000 are referred for court proceedings
- 2,100 are placed in the correctional system
- 16,250 high school students are chemically dependent
- 25,000 are referred to Department of Human Services for help with abuse and neglect
- 2,600 drop out of school
- 15,000 experience emotional problems
- 480 attempt suicide
- 3,000 become pregnant (Maine State Department of Corrections, 1989)

Most experts agree that these figures represent only the tip of the iceberg. Based upon awareness of, and concern over, these troubling patterns, a growing dialogue has emerged in recent years among Maine's civic, educational, and business leaders about how best to address the problems facing Maine's young people. These concerns have led to a statewide push for "higher aspirations" for Mainers.

As early as 1984 the problem of increasing the effectiveness of public education's response to at-risk and isolated students was explored at the highest levels. A blue ribbon report on education, prepared in that year for the governor, began to question the relationship between Maine students aspirations and educational outcomes (Governor's Commission on the Status of Education in Maine, 1984). The report contributed to the Maine Educational Reform Act of 1984 which established graduation requirements, new teacher certification standards, a local school approval process and statewide student testing. While these reforms were the most sweeping in the history of Maine education, there was still much that needed to be done if all students were to have the benefits of a quality education. Recognizing this, Dean Robert Cobb of the University of Maine's College of Education convened an interdisciplinary group at the University to consider how the aspirations issue might be broadened and more closely linked to the experience and lives of Maine's young people.

The first University of Maine Aspirations Conference resulted in several key outcomes:

- a broader definition of the aspirations idea—one that focused more on quality of life issues was established;
- the need for a relevant research base was recognized.

It appeared that the aspirations problem varied along cultural lines and that an urban/rural dichotomy could be observed in the way students felt about such things as enrolling in college. By 1987, the aspirations concept had proved to be a useful one for analyzing the rate at which Maine's culture was adapting to hanging economic forces.

A second Aspirations Conference, in May of 1987, brought together over 600 educators, state officials and parents. The conference reinforced earlier conclusions and resulted in a clearer recognition that social and cultural issues were as important as economic factors in shaping student aspirations. It was also clear that the self-perpetuating cycles of poverty and "low" aspirations

that characterized many Maine communities would be difficult to comprehensively analyze or quickly change. In order to address these concerns, one of the first steps taken by the University as part of the 1987 conference was to establish a research committee. The research committee's initial efforts were directed toward establishing a "definition" of aspirations which would allow them to operationalize the aspirations construct and pave the way for systematic inquiry into the issue.

Webster's second edition defines aspiration as, "1. a) strong desire or ambition, as for advancement, honor, etc.; b) the thing so desired." Aspire is defined as, "1. to be ambitious (to get or do something, especially something lofty or grand); to yearn or seek (after)." These definitions provided a starting point from which to consider the aspirations issue. However, the more the term was used by educators, politicians, and the business community, it became apparent that "Aspirations" meant different things to different groups and individuals.

The research committee felt that a rather narrow set of meanings and assumptions had begun to color conversations and pronouncements about the aspirations of Maine people. Most worrisome to the group was the fact that aspirations seemed to quickly become equated with the notion that an individual was somehow "deficient" if he or she didn't aspire to higher education, white-collar careers, or upper-middle class values in general. The "high aspirations/low aspirations" labels which began to be attached to individuals, groups, and certain geographic regions of the state suggested that a less judgmental, less value-laden model was needed to replace this "deficit model."

The committee's discussions yielded an "investment model" of aspirations. Simply stated, this model defines an aspiration as "any goal, decided upon beforehand, in which an individual invests either time, effort, or money to attain." (Sherwood, 1988) It was also suggested that the relative intensity of an aspiration could be determined by calculating the percentage of one's total available resources invested to achieve a desired goal. This approach would adjust for differences in socio-economic status.

The research committee also identified several domains within which people tend to discuss their ambitions and desires for advancement. These are career aspirations, educational aspirations, and quality of life aspirations.

Career aspirations represent the kinds of career goals which students set for themselves and the investments of time, effort and capital which they are willing to make to achieve those goals. Educational aspirations focus on the level of education which an individual is willing to pursue. (Consistency or inconsistency between career aspirations and educational plans allow a researcher to check the "reality" of a student's future plans.) Quality of life aspirations represents lifestyles an individual hopes to achieve. These would include the effective, relational, material, and behavioral (such as leisure and recreational) preferences and the investments made to secure those conditions as part of a life plan.

While the investment model succeeds in avoiding certain value judgments regarding an individual's aspira-

tions, there are certain important historical, social, and economic realities which the committee believes must be taken into account when considering the relative desirability of certain aspirations. There seems to be little doubt that Maine's economy, as well as the national and global economy, is undergoing rapid change. Technology and skills related to communication and information processing will play an increasing role in our work and in our lives at home. These changes will result in new demands on workers. More educational training and increased competence in technical skills which relate to math, science ability, communication skills, problem solving skills, and enhanced self-esteem will ultimately translate into greater options and opportunity, and potentially a more desirable quality of life for most Maine people. Therefore, goals and life plans developed with recognition of these trends are seen as desirable (Elkins, 1987).

By the end of the 1987 conference it became clear that the aspirations idea was sufficiently broad and powerful to form the basis for a statewide initiative.

Aspirations: The Implementation Phase

In the months following the second University of Maine Aspirations Conference, initiatives were established by both Governor John McKernan and University of Maine President Dale Lick. Both began to take leadership roles in addressing the aspirations issue in Maine. The placement of the University of Maine Aspirations Project (UMAP) under the auspices of the Office of the President—though actually housed in the College of Education—had the effect of ensuring that the program's goals included a strong public outreach component as well as securing its high priority for funding.

Begun in January of 1988, the Governor's initiative took the form of a business/education partnership and was titled the Maine Aspirations Compact. The following goals for the compact were established: raising personal expectations of students, improving the academic achievement of students, and expanding the educational, career, and personal choices of students. Organized through the Maine Development Foundation and the Department of Educational and Cultural Services, the Maine Aspirations Compact began to generate enthusiastic support from Maine's business sector, educators, and community leaders who saw the need for a better educated work force and increased local support for children at a time of unprecedented economic growth and development in much of the state.

The aspirations movement in Maine is currently making the transition from an effective but generalized idea to a fully implemented set of programs. Leaders in both the University's and the Governor's programs believe that the aspirations idea is important to meeting the needs of both individuals and the state during this age of economic and cultural transformation. Because of the stature of their chief spokespersons and their access to the media, the two aspirations programs have been able to communicate the aspirations idea in a generalized form to a

wide audience. Both programs are aware, however, of how fragile and susceptible to misinterpretation ideas become once they have received that level of public exposure through the media. Thus during the implementation phase that is currently under way all aspirations programs face the challenge of linking rhetoric to reality.

University of Maine Aspirations Project

At the University of Maine, the Aspirations Project has established goals for 1988-89 in three general areas: 1) the identification and promotion of local and national model programs, 2) providing leadership and public information, 3) reviewing and conducting research on aspirations. UMAP staff and teaching faculty and curriculum specialists from the University of Maine's College of Education are currently addressing the first of these goals with a program of school visitations geared to recognize and support existing programs and techniques that appear to have the effect, directly or indirectly, of motivating students to pursue life plans consciously and enthusiastically.

These efforts are designed to support and disseminate the often unrecognized efforts of successful teachers and administrators and to generate a resource base of exciting school-based programs and curricula for interested educators. This approach has been well received by educators and will serve to add sharper definition to what the aspirations idea means at the local school level. Moreover, this approach recognizes that positive, effective change is already occurring in many schools across Maine and will be enhanced if the schools receive and utilize the support of the state's land grant university. UMAP has also undertaken a four-district school improvement initiative based on certain assumptions about personal empowerment, educational reform and the change process as it relates to public schools. Most previous efforts to restructure schools in Maine have focused on structural and functional issues such as increases in graduation requirements, higher teacher salaries, and teacher recertification. Many other efforts have been undertaken without regard for what is known about the complexities of the change process as it relates to public education. UMAP's school improvement strategies focus on people and their individual levels of commitment to teaching, to students and to the reform process itself. Initial work with four K-12 school systems over the next four years will emphasize teacher empowerment, community support for education, and greater teacher and student involvement in decision-making concerning the school improvement process.

Other immediate goals of the University's outreach component includes collaboration with the locally highly successful TRIO programs (Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Onward Program), the model programs of the Maine Job Corps, the youth development activities of the Maine Cooperative Extension Service, and other successful school-based programs to identify a comprehensive menu of programs that work. Access to these resources, along with opportunities for hands-on activities

and innovative model programs, will be made available to educators and community leaders as they plan and implement their own comprehensive programs to address the problems of youth development in their communities.

As UMAP has sought to foster the transition of aspirations ideas into practice, it has begun to review and apply research fundings in the areas of motivation (Maslow 1954; Hertzberg 1959; Csikszentmihalyi 1971, 1988), achievement (Berliner, D. and Rosenshine, B. 1977; Gage, N.C. and Giaconia, R., 1981; McIntire, W.G. and Marion, S.F. 1989), educational productivity (Walberg, Fraser and Welch, 1986; Walberg 1984a, 1984b), time orientation (Ben-Baruch, E. 1988), the change process (Havelock, R., 1973), self-concept (Coopersmith, S., 1971; Mitchell, J., 1975; Gurney, P. 1987), and personal efficacy (Maeroff, G. 1988; Fink, D. 1988). This work suggests the need for further conceptualization of the aspirations construct. The recent decision to establish a National Center for Aspirations Research at the University of Maine promises to make aspirations research a high priority within the University in the coming years. The University aspires to become a national leader in youth development as it works to apply its aspirations research in public schools.

Maine Aspirations Compact

Formed as a result of the 1987 Governor's Task Force report on the economy of Maine, which included a series of recommendations calling for more investment in Maine's people and more communication between education and business, the Maine Aspirations Compact sought to build on the University's previous work in researching and broadening the concept of aspirations. The Compact's thirty-three member advisory board was appointed by the Governor in January, 1988, and represents large and small businesses, craftspeople, higher and vocational educators, state government and local education officials. It is staffed by "loaned personnel from the Department of Educational and Cultural Services and the Maine Development Foundation." The staffing partnership provides an education perspective as well as the Maine Development Foundation's business and community development expertise.

The Maine Aspirations Compact held a series of regional forums in the fall of 1988 to identify issues and directions which could legitimately be pursued by schools and communities working together. These forums resulted in the identification of the important roles played by families, community/economic conditions, and schools in the formation of the child's personal expectations and aspirations. With this focus on the "ethos" of the community, the Compact found that any approach to increasing aspirations needed to go well beyond the boundaries of the classroom and the school-yard to include involvement by communities as a whole.

The three aspirations goals were translated into a work plan which included: heightening public awareness of the need for everyone to be responsible for education and welfare of children; creating a guidebook of aspirations

strategies; creating a summer pilot program for high school students; and helping communities form partnerships to address the needs of local children and youth.

The first part of the guidebook, called "Helping Children Succeed: Increasing the Aspirations of Maine Youth" was published in February, 1989 (Maine Aspirations Compact, 1989). It outlines a series of strategies and conclusions concerning the aspirations issue. Part II resulted in the publication of "Helping Children Succeed: A Handbook of Programs, Schools and Resources that are Making a Difference" published in December, 1989. This loose-leaf notebook of program models describes how the strategies have been implemented in Maine and elsewhere. This model programs document was jointly written and published by UMAP and the Maine Aspirations Compact. The third part of the guidebook will provide educators and communities with processes which will help with the implementation of the compact's strategies at the state and local levels.

The Compact's student summer program, initiated as a pilot project in the summer of 1988, is an eight-week work and educational enrichment program for 16 year old Maine students. The program was developed as a result of information collected at regional forums about the geographic and social isolations of Maine students. In addition both forum participants and the Compact's advisory board strongly advocated program activities which had direct impact on students.

In the pilot program, 19 students from three rural towns in northern Maine worked six hours daily in southern Maine's booming coastal region. They lived on the campus of the University of New England (in Biddeford), and spent the balance of their time participating in educational enrichment activities. The students selected to participate in the program were not "gifted and talented" or those most at risk, although several were living in foster homes. They were students who teachers and parents felt might blossom with benefit from this kind of work/study/live-in experience.

In 1989, the summer program will expand to include urban students from southern Maine. These students will travel northward to experience rural summer life while students from the northern part of the state will once again experience Maine's southern coastal region. Both programs will provide students with practical educational experiences, independent work experience, cooperative living arrangements, and cultural enrichment activities. The Compact's summer program is also intended to serve as an example of the kinds of activities and experiences which can help Maine's young people to make more informed personal and educational choices.

A major fund-raising effort is also underway by the Maine Aspirations Compact organized through a new entity called the Maine Aspirations Foundation. The Foundation is currently establishing guidelines by which it will fund state and local level aspirations projects. A \$600,000 grant to the Foundation by L.L. Bean, Inc. further demonstrates that the aspirations idea has great potential for weaving together a broad public/private coalition on behalf of Maine children.

During the past year, the two aspirations programs have begun to develop their own identities, though in the minds of many there may still be some confusion about how the two are related. Both programs report that a high level of cooperation exists between the Compact and the University staffs. It is not clear, however, whether the existence of two programs, both engaged in highly public initiatives, will be a source of long-term confusion to the public. It remains to be seen, too, how the different methods of implementation utilized by the programs will be received at the local level and how effective each will be. Among the more important challenges faced by the aspirations movement will be the long-term management of this dual identity.

THE ASPIRATIONS PROGRAMS: FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Partnership and the Aspirations Compact

Nationally, business/education partnerships have been growing steadily for the last ten years. Virtually every large city and every populous state has some kind of business/education partnership movement under way. These "partnerships" range from adopt-a-school situations, in which a business "adopts" a single school and then provides services, money, or equipment for the school, to partnerships which are based on somewhat stringent contracted agreements. The best known is the Boston Compact (Rossano, K., 1986), in which the Boston business community prescribed a variety of academic achievement attitudinal and attendance requirements for the Boston schools in return for post-graduation and summer job slots for Boston students. The Boston Compact is currently re-evaluating its contract, in large part because the Boston schools have been unable to accomplish their part of the contract.

The national partnerships movement has established a broad base of support. As a fundamental component of the Reagan administration's domestic policies, private sector initiatives have become familiar parts of the corporate and educational landscape of the 1980's. The stated concerns of some of those who support business/education partnership initiatives center on themes of international competitiveness in educational achievement, national security concerns arising from a lack of educational preparedness, and the need for American business to remain viable, competitive, and productive. Certain groups like Continuing Education Development, represent a detailed understanding of the needs of children and the roles the community plays in supporting and nurturing all children as an economic and social necessity.

The educational reform agenda supported by American business is far-reaching. Corporate America is expressing its concern that public schools are out-moded and continue to function like the 19th-century factories they were originally designed to resemble. This is considered to be unacceptable in a nation which is rapidly moving into the 21st century. Some partnership advocates want stronger

leadership from state government to provide incentives and leadership for educational reform. Others believe that parents should be free to decide which public schools their children will attend and that healthy competition will revitalize our educational system. Lowering dropout rates, increasing college enrollments, and establishing new preschool programs are all being emphasized by one or another sector of the partnerships movement.

These ideas are not new. But the fact that many of the nation's most influential leaders are vigorously advocating them suggests that real changes in the ways in which we educate our children may indeed be forthcoming after decades of entrenchment.

While businesses are asking "What can we do to make the schools work better," Mary Futrell, president of the National Education Association cautions leaders not to approach educators with prescriptions. If they challenge existing practices from the outside, educators are likely to resist. The appropriate approach, according to Futrell, is a collaborative approach. The emphasis must be "shifted from teachers being objects of change to being advisors to and then partners in change." (Futrell, 1988)

The Maine Aspirations Compact has been sensitive to the kinds of concerns expressed by Ms. Futrell. If partnership is to prove to be a valid method for raising student aspirations in Maine, the Compact believes that the partnership model must be used. Like the national partnerships model, the Maine Aspirations Compact sees the community as an integral part of the educational formula for improving. For this reason they have focused their efforts to organize local business and community leaders to support and encourage educational improvement in their communities. Partnerships must account for the character and independence of Maine communities, as well as all that is most effective from the national partnership movement. The Compact has been guided by six basic ideas in development its partnership model.

First, partnership is not an end in itself; it is a method for raising student aspirations. Second, the goal of any state or local partnership must be to create the conditions under which students can raise their personal expectations, increase their academic achievement, and broaden the proposal and career choices open to them; thereby having the ultimate goal of making a direct impact on students. Third, the partnership must be a true partnership, in the sense that it is an independent relationship between equals and not a school activity or a Chamber of Commerce activity. Fourth, Maine's partnership model must provide local people with the freedom to configure their group in ways which best make sense in their community, and should not prescribe activities or approaches. Fifth, because direct student impact is the ultimate goal of the partnership, local groups must be committed to work together for at least three years. Finally, such partnerships must view themselves as developmental, not static, understanding that what they are able to accomplish initially, is only the beginning of their work together.

Some key questions remain concerning the applicability and potential effectiveness of the business/education model in Maine. Can relatively small rural businesses, with

finite human resources, money and time undertake the kinds of partnership relationships with local schools that will ultimately result in "higher aspirations" for Maine children? Are Maine's largest businesses willing and able to reach beyond the communities in which they are located to serve the more isolated rural areas of the state where the needs are often greatest?

Maine's largest businesses are well represented on the Compact's Advisory Board. There is little question that Maine's business community has a major stake in the educational and career aspirations of Maine youth. But despite the support of the Governor, the Commissioner of Education, and leaders of the business community, it is not yet clear whether this (business/education) partnership experiment will produce the desired impact. Many Mainers will judge the Maine Aspirations Compact's ultimate success by watching its impact in rural northern and eastern Maine—sometimes called the second Maine—where economic and educational initiatives from Augusta have met most often in the past with limited success.

The University of Maine's Land Grant Mission

The mission of the University of Maine's Aspirations Project is consistent with the general mission of Land Grant Universities. That mission, adopted under President Lincoln, remains a commitment to teaching and teacher education, research in the public interest, and outreach services to improve the quality of life of state's citizenry. UMAP is the product of a new commitment by Maine's university system to extend its outreach services to the people of the state.

The National Cooperative Extension System, the outreach arm of the nation's land grant universities, has recently begun a national initiative aimed at youth at risk. The Youth At Risk Task Force has made sweeping recommendations which would dedicate the resources of the Cooperative Extension System and its national 4-H network to addressing issues of youth development and life skills education through a non-formal, experiential, research-based curriculum. This effort would revitalize the role which the nation's research institutions would play in fulfilling their mission, of providing research-based curricula, technical assistance, and leadership to improve the quality of life of citizens within each state. This is precisely the mission of UMAP.

The University's Aspirations Project cites evidence of the existence of an "aspirations problem" by pointing to the low numbers of Maine students applying to, and attending, post-secondary educational institutions in comparison to students from New Hampshire and Vermont. They also point out that University of Maine first-year students report lower ratings in the area of "social confidence" than their out-of-state peers and a general reluctance to move beyond small rural communities to explore possibilities for employment and education, as compared with their northern New England peers (Cobb, et al. 1985). It has also become apparent from discussions with many Maine teachers and parents that there is growing concern about their students' work

ethic and motivation, and an overall attitude of apathy or complacency which pervades many Maine schools and communities. Given the tremendous pressures and demands on Maine natives and communities due to a recent surge of immigration and land speculation, UMAP believes that now, more than ever, Maine people need to have skills, instruction and confidence to plan for the kind of future they want for themselves, their children and their state.

A major focus of the University of Maine's Aspirations Project is the involvement of students in the development and dissemination of Project resources. One example of this is the Aspirations Teen Theatre Program. This program is utilizing University students to conduct workshops and performances designed to raise awareness and interest among students and teachers about the many barriers students face as they strive to fulfill their potential as happy, healthy and productive adults. Jointly sponsored by the University's Aspirations Project and Cooperative Extension, the Teen Theatre Program utilizes an interactive format which allows students to practice solving a variety of personal and social problems along with the student performers and to try out alternative strategies for dealing with difficult issues. The vignettes and audience participation activities are intended to make aspirations issues come alive for audiences as they watch young people wrestle with the problems of peer pressure, parents, substance abuse, career and educational decision-making, financial aid and short-term gratification. Teen Theatre is proving to be a powerful vehicle for providing teens and adults with a chance to consider their personal choices and the impact these choices can have on their future.

In addition, UMAP recently sponsored a "Teen Summit on Maine's Future" designed to provide leadership training to student participants, to provide local leadership in the area of student aspirations, and to get feedback from Maine teens which will be used to establish future project goals and shape educational outreach programs. This year's participants included teams of middle school and high school students from 22 schools across the state who gathered for two days at the University of Maine in Orono. The Summit has been an important step in the process of increasing student ownership and involvement in Maine's aspirations movement and provides the project with student leadership teams in 22 schools prepared to become school participants in follow-up activities over the next several years.

UMAP is also exploring ways to provide technical assistance in purchasing and utilizing telecommunications equipment within Maine public schools. Technological links with the University and the rest of the world can provide exciting educational opportunities for students and adults. In fact, UMaine researchers are working via NovaNET and BITNET with colleagues as far away as Hawaii and Israel. Systems like NovaNET have also been used successfully to provide individualized educational alternatives for students with special needs and/or interests which cannot be addressed by traditional educational delivery systems (Wright, P., 1988). Such

links may be especially valuable in Maine's most isolated communities where geographic barriers limit student exposure to career options, technical training, cultural experiences, and diverse role models.

The University's Aspirations Project offers the state's aspirations movement a vehicle for continued research and student involvement as well as an array of activities, resources, and outreach services which can be utilized by compacts, schools, and communities to address local concerns. Yet several questions remain regarding the ultimate effectiveness of the project. Will the University's program be viewed by the public as simply a self-serving vehicle for increasing college enrollments? Will it deliver on its promise to provide effective research-based programming which will benefit non-college bound youth? Will the project be able to enlist the support and cooperation of its own University community in dedicating itself to the land grant mission? Will the project be able to overcome an "ivory tower" image and establish effective grassroots partnerships with local educators resulting in increased educational opportunity and locally "owned" aspirations initiatives. And finally, will the University's own teacher education programs have the ability to produce a new generation of educational professionals possessing the necessary skills, knowledge, and commitment to provide effective educational leadership and a new level of professionalism and excellence in Maine's classrooms and schools?

CONCLUSIONS

Maine's aspirations programs face a number of complex problems in order to be successful in meeting their stated goals. However, these two programs are potentially powerful vehicles for coordinating a statewide effort to overcome the impediments to higher expectations among and for Maine youth. The fact that the aspirations movement has garnered the enthusiastic participation of the Office of the Governor, the President of the University of Maine, and an influential group of business leaders places it in a unique position to have a major impact in Maine's geographically decentralized and culturally diverse environment. As suggested above, however, the programs must successfully make the transition from stating purposes and defining goals to successfully implementing a series of specific programs that meet the needs of local communities and their schools. Moreover, the programs must ensure that the current dual identity of the aspirations movement—with separate programs in existence at the University and the state level—is viewed as a positive and mutually supportive structure.

The Aspirations Compact and University of Maine's Aspirations Project have taken an important step toward clarifying the scope of the problem and providing a sufficiently broad framework for implementing solutions. However, the future success of the aspirations movement may depend on how well the programs are able to add substance to the initial structure that has been created and on how well the programs manage the highly visible public life of the aspirations idea.

In its essence, the aspirations movement is concerned with individual choices and the personal and cultural prerequisites that shape those choices. The choices our young people make today will significantly influence the Maine of the future. Those involved in Maine's Aspiration movement strongly believe that what is invested in our young people will be returned in a more prosperous, self-fulfilled and vibrant population in the years to come.

Senator George Mitchell summed it up best in his address to the 1987 University of Maine Aspirations Conference when he said: "How far our children go and what they do is up to them. We can help them understand that life's rewards come from opportunity and effort. That means doing the best you can at all times in whatever you do." The senator went on to quote John Gardner, saying, "An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water." (Mitchell, G., 1987).

Maine's Aspirations movement provides enormous potential for understanding and affecting that which motivates individuals to higher achievements. Moreover, through the sustained efforts of the two aspiration programs, students throughout Maine may indeed come to aspire—be they sons of philosophers or daughters of plumbers—to more fulfilling goals.

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