

Dannel Malloy  
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Week of November 18

Trustees -

Given the attention paid to the topic at our meeting this past Monday in Farmington, you won't be surprised to learn that my team and I were on the road again Wednesday through Friday for six more meetings to discuss unified accreditation with our university community. Four of these meetings were with students, and hearing of their experiences convinces me more than ever that we're on the right path toward unified accreditation.

More on that below. But first, some other highlights of the week.

I'd like to thank Trustee and Maine Education Commissioner Pender Makin for joining me in Orono Thursday afternoon to host a reunion of past Maine Teachers of the Year who are UMS alumni. We're immensely proud to count twenty-two of the last twenty-eight Teachers of the Year as graduates of a University of Maine System university.

As you may know, the Maine Teacher of the Year is a Maine Department of Education program that is administered by Educate Maine, a business-led organization working to advance educational attainment and readiness for work among all Mainers. Honorees are outstanding teachers who represent thousands of excellent educators and serve as advocates for the teaching profession, education, and students.

Our reception, at which eight previous UMS alum TOTY honorees joined 2020 Teacher of the Year Heather Whitaker, who holds an M.S.Ed. in Literacy Education from the University of Southern Maine, was a part of the Maine Values You student outreach campaign I launched in October to increase the number of Maine high school graduates pursuing a post-secondary education in the state, in this case by publicly highlighting the success of public university graduates.

My travels to the County on Wednesday and Thursday for unified accreditation meetings gave me a chance to tend to other matters as well. Wednesday evening included a dinner hosted by UMPI President Ray Rice, along with his wife Rachel and precocious 9-year-old daughter Naomi, with Ray and Sandy Gauvin. Ray and Sandy are UMS alums, long-time UMPI and County supporters, and founding directors of the Aroostook Aspirations Initiative, which supports higher education aspirations in the County most notably through \$2,000 Gauvin Scholarships for County high school graduates to attend UMPI, UMFk, or NMCC. The next morning, Jim Thelen and I were honored to attend the Aroostook Partnership annual meeting at Northern Maine Community College along with Trustees Sam Collins and Tim Doak. There, in addition to an overview of Aroostook Partnership progress on strategic initiatives, we heard a call to action from my Maine Community College System counterpart Dave Daigler, who described the critical need to give Mainers easy access to targeted credentials that provide the exact training and upskilling a particular learner needs, in the modalities and on the schedule most suited to that person.

A quick aside: I was with Dave at a Lumina Foundation State Policy Retreat in California in the days before our recent Farmington Board meeting. He shares my commitment to making smoother pathways between our educational systems, even beyond the progress made in recent years. Based on our conversations, I can report that we will be redoubling our efforts to identify Mainers who left our

universities without a degree but have enough credit for an associate's level certification. If in partnership with MCCC such individuals can obtain that degree level based on the stranded UMS credits the learner already has, he or she will have both the marketplace boost that comes with a first degree as well as an incentive to return for a four-year degree or other credential. Doing this critically important work will advance both our teaching and public service missions to the citizens of Maine.

Jim Thelen and I went from the Aroostook Partnership breakfast to the downtown Presque Isle Governor's Restaurant, where we met over coffee with Fort Fairfield's David McRae, a retired science teacher and now second-term State Representative who serves on the Labor and Education and Agriculture Conservation and Forestry committees. We had a good and far-ranging conversation, and I took advantage of the opportunity to not only explain our unified accreditation plans, but also to ask for his support for a three percent funding increase for FY21 should Governor Mills include our request in her expected supplemental budget in the upcoming legislative session.

Back now to our students.

In our unified accreditation travels this past week, I heard from students in Machias, Presque Isle, Farmington, and Augusta (where students from the Saco and Rockland centers joined via video as well). I'm impressed everywhere with our students' tenacity and desire to better themselves by attaining the degrees they're seeking as soon as they can. At the same time, I'm sobered by some of the stories I heard: too many of the students who spoke with me expressed frustration at not being able to graduate on time because a required class wasn't taught when they needed it, and for those students, the effort and barriers to overcome to attempt to find and enroll in similar courses at other universities were downright daunting. When they've been tenacious enough to find and enroll in the other university's class, they learn they have to pay local student fees in both places, or aren't eligible for the honor roll in either, and, in one worst-case scenario I heard about in Presque Isle, a UMPI student taking a course elsewhere was told she would need to move out of the residence hall because she wasn't taking a sufficient number of credits at UMPI.

I expect you're thinking now precisely what went through my mind on hearing these stories -- we simply must do better to help our students attain the degrees they're sacrificing so much for. To be sure, attaining unified accreditation across our universities isn't the answer by itself. We've been honest about that throughout this effort. But when having unified accreditation requires our universities to think differently about how to serve students with the full panoply of courses and services available collectively from all of our universities, I hope -- no, I trust -- our university leaders and student service providers will come up with the right answers for our students.

With Thanksgiving ahead, I'll be informing our UMS community tomorrow that we'll follow the State's lead by closing at noon on Wednesday so our employees can begin their holiday plans a bit early. And with the shortened work week, I'll forego sending an update next weekend.

We have hard work to do. It's good work. When we work well together, we truly make a difference in the lives of Maine's citizens.

In this week, I'm thankful you've given me the opportunity to lead that work forward for UMS.

Happy Thanksgiving to you and your families,  
Dan