

**I prepared this statement in preparation for speaking before the school committee last week (3/14/18). However, I did not present it at that time. Rather I focused the discussion on explaining that I felt PBL was failing and indicated how it came to Maine. I suggested that given what is going on in Augusta with regard to the Proficiency Based Diploma Law, LD 1422, we have an opportunity to be candid and openly discuss whether this system of education has merit and is producing results. I did not address at the meeting that my understanding is that many teachers will not come forward with concerns around PBL or the changes for fear of reprisal, being targeted, and/or labeled as negative. However, I did address the concern about the silencing of teachers in an e-mail I sent to Superintendent Grondin on the morning after the school committee meeting. I have also forwarded much of my research and concerns in written form to the school committee members as of this weekend.**

#### PBL: ITS ORIGIN AND BASIS IN MAINE

My concerns and questions concerning PBL remain even though I have sought answers from teachers, administrators, students, and other parents. Over time my questions have turned from debating the merits of Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) to trying to understand its origin and basis ...

Specifically, how was it that this system arrived here in our schools and where did it come from?

TO UNDERSTAND ITS ORIGIN AND BASIS (in an effort to understand whether it has merit)

I was hoping to find scholarly articles with evidence/research supporting such a major overhaul of our public school system. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

For me, the history of this current “reform” has helped put into perspective and validate the concerns that I share with others, parents, students and teachers alike. The more I have learned the more concerned I have become....So tonight I would like to share with you and the Auburn community what I have learned:

My method of research....follow the money.

And the short answer regarding the origin and basis of PBL....IT WAS BROUGHT TO MAINE BY THE GATES FOUNDATION and its millions....

But, the devil is in the details...

Let's begin in 2009

FIRST....there was the warmup in January of 2009....Gates gave Nellie Mae \$500,000 “to lead a four-state effort to better align state, district, and local education policies.” It's worth remembering that description when you are told that other states are going this way....that it is the future of education, suggesting that it is an already established system of learning.

NEXT....in September of 2010....having primed the pump...the Gates Foundation gives the seed money for PBL.. to the tune of \$1.75 million...with a directive “to identify and fund local education agencies and networks to advance acceleration tools in proficiency-based pathways environments” In other words, start distributing money to get "experts" like Great Schools Partnership to focus on and push for PBL...

Here is the real kicker ....Nellie Mae also courts and schmoozes with the Maine Department of Education (MDOE)...how do I know this, a year later, on August 1, 2011, Nellie Mae gave a grant to the Maine DOE in the amount of \$97,000 for an initiative which is described by Nellie Mae as a "State Levels System Change."

Specifically the monies were to create a Center for Best Practices and Policies for those working on "standards-based" education. I have been told by teachers that prior to PBL and its targets, they were already teaching to standards. I find the description of this grant interesting because it references "standard-based" education, not proficiency based education or "mass customized learning. Remember at this time, there is no Proficiency Diploma Law. I wonder what was the understanding of the Maine DOE about this grant? Were we truly talking about a center helping with "standard-based" education or was PBL the goal all along? Were there strings attached? Were there understandings or promises made behind the scenes?

NEXT...Nellie Mae decides to Wine and Dine the legislature's Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, which just happens to be considering LD 1422, at that time....Maine's Proposed Proficiency Based Diploma Law.

How does Nellie Mae do that....a grant....

In August of 2011 Nellie Mae gives \$50,000 to the Maine Coalition for Excellence in Education to host a legislative retreat for the Education Committee on PBL, which incidently the Maine Dept. of Education helped to develop as a co-host. To me it sounds like the Dept. of Educ. had already made up its mind to get on board with the agenda of Nellie Mae and the Gates Foundation. This grant is also described as a "State Levels System Change" initiative.

Personally, I want to know more about this retreat and what independent research, if any, our Department of Education and Education Committee did along the way. It is hard not to see it as a party to introduce and celebrate the exciting new future of education in Maine compliments of the Gates Foundation and Nellie Mae. Did we jump because of a promise of money for an underfunded and underperforming education system? Did we do it responsibly?

FINALLY....Not surprisingly, the Education Committee voted unanimously that the Proficiency Based Diploma Law (LD1422) ought to pass, it became law in May of 2012. LD 1422 required not only proficiency based diplomas but also required "the development of a strategic plan to achieve the goals with the policy framework." From Summary of Bill in legislative history.

In other words, because we rushed to pass the Diploma Law, without consideration of a strategic policy the Maine Department of Education climbed into bed with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and a number of affiliated entities as a means of developing policy and providing guidance to school districts.

At this point, Nellie Mae and the Maine DOE climb into bed together...

In December of 2012, Nellie Mae awarded another \$92,000 to the Maine DOE to beef up the Center for Best Practices and Policies. Nellie Mae is ready and willing to support us in our statewide mandated pursuit of a proficiency based diploma and aid in the implementation of PBL.

And again, in 2013

Nellie Mae awards another \$92,000 additional funding for the Center for Best Practices and Policies that is on the MDOE website. It is worth noting, however, that the language of this grant shifts....now the Center's primary focus is providing guidance to districts as they "develop proficiency and student-centered systems." The original grant for the Center in 2011 has referred to "standard-based" education.

Was PBL a proven system of teaching with resources already available or are our teachers and educators being asked to develop and implement, while continuing to provide a quality education to our students?

Nellie Mae has that covered too. They have thought of everything. Nellie Mae can recommend other resources too. Its Board of Directors, according to its 2015/2016 a majority of its members are affiliated with entities and organizations promoting PBL, like the Great Schools Partnership in Portland. They even give grants to those entities too promote develop of policy related to PBL. Maine will be fine, just hire those organizations and their "experts" to coach and counsel our schools through the PBL process.

AND NOW...2018

Here we are, 6 years later....we are still trying to work out the implementation of PBL....in theory one thing...in practice it is a different animal. And to make matters worse, systems naturally will need to be tweaked by individual district because one size does not fit all.

In summary, even Gates acknowledges that his efforts are tests to see what works and what doesn't and to collect data, referring to his efforts as pilots of "potentially transformative solutions."

In his October 19, 2017 speech he states,

"If there is one thing I have learned, it is that no matter how enthusiastic we might be about one approach or another, the decision to go from pilot to wide-scale usage is ultimately and always something that has to be decided by you and others in the field." He has said, buy in is required for it to be successful. I can tell you based on countless conversations I have had with teachers, students, parents and taxpayers....at this time you do not have "buy in." Nor do a number of other school districts around the state where, despite numerous efforts and expenditures, no consistent and convincing proof has been generated that this experiment is improving our schools. Remember, setting up PBL in select states has been done, in part, to test and provide data on Gates education initiatives.

Now what do we do with this information.....especially as it relates to our school district, as well as the statewide controversy surrounding the proficiency based diploma law and the implementation of PBL...

What I can tell you about that is:

On Feb. 28, when the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs met for a work session to consider a proposed bill to delay the implementation of PBL/PBD because schools continue to experience difficulties During that session, a motion was made to amend the bill with language to REPEAL the proficiency based diploma law of 2012 and return control to the local districts.

Now, more than ever it is imperative that we discuss openly and candidly what difficulties exist and what successes have been achieved with this unproven system of education. I appreciate the hard work that has been undertaken by our district officials because they felt that they had no choice under the PBL law.

However, I feel strongly, as do others, that Superintendent Grondin and you our representatives on the school committee must:

- 1.) lift the gag order that the Auburn teachers are currently under. It has been particularly disheartening to learn that teachers have been yelled at and berated if they did not understand or agree with certain aspects of implementation, even as the admin. admits that there are still problems that must be worked out. I have received anonymous statements from teachers fearing reprisal. In one instance, I was later contacted by the teacher who identified themselves and desperately asked me to destroy the two page statement saying they feared reprisal should anyone discover they had written it; and
- 2.) provide a public forum so that we will have the benefit of their experience and observations going forward. Some can provide a unique perspective given that they are parents as well as teachers. The concerns of parents, students, teachers, and taxpayers should be heard (including taxpayers and parents).

TO that end, I have with me a petition which has only been circulating for just over a week signed by \_\_\_\_\_ residents of Auburn, consisting of the stakeholders I mentioned which respectfully requests that the Superintendent's Office and you the school committee provide a public forum where people are invited to be heard on PBL....It would also be great if a flyer could be sent home with all students informing parents that now is the time to be heard, regardless of whether they like or dislike PBL.

TIME TO DECIDE MAINE.....Who is paying the price for this experiment?....Gates has billions and can move on...my daughters will have one high school experience....

Who is paying the real price of PBL? Not Gates...our administration, our teachers, our parents and our students....we need to decide if it is a price we are willing to pay in full. I would also note here that in 2014/2015 we spent \$115,838 on training for Mass Customized Learning. Will costs continue...can you say, what they will be over time as this system, wholly dependent on technology, continues to evolve?

I will forward my remarks to you by e-mail so that you can reference them in verifying your research into this matter. I hope that you, as Auburn's education representatives, pause and reflect at this time on not only what we are doing, but WHY we are doing it and let that inform your decisions going forward.

## **WHY PBL FOR AUBURN.....AND IS IT THE RIGHT CHOICE?**

Superintendent Grondin has said that Auburn was moving in the direction of proficiency based learning even prior to the Diploma Law. I have been trying to figure out why. **What inspired Auburn to take on such a dramatic shift in our approach to education?**

After discovering that Auburn was the only Maine school to apply for the district Race to the Top, federal grant program, in 2012 and 2013, I am left to wonder if we were chasing the money/funding source. Now I am interested in seeing the research, surveys, comments, community input, etc. that was part of the grant application.....Did we have a plan and then look to see how we might fund it? OR Did we see \$\$\$\$ and decided to map our path accordingly?

And as you consider whether it was the possibility of \$\$\$ that led us down the PBL path, you should also know that Auburn decided it wanted to have a leadership role in implementing this "reform" in Maine and positioned itself accordingly.

Specifically, the "MAINE COHORT FOR CUSTOMIZED LEARNING" was created in February of 2012...just as Maine and its Department of Education, with the generous help of Nellie Mae and the Gates Foundation, was embarking on the "PPBL/MASS CUSTOMIZED LEARNING EXPERIMENT." Auburn was there from the start.

The official mission of the Maine Cohort For Customized Learning is "to lead the development, implementation and promotion of customized learning."

Charter Members, among others, include:

- 1.) Diane Doiron, Maine Department of Education (DOE);
- 2.) Don Siviski, Maine DOE;
- 3.) Steve Garton, Maine DOE;
- 4.) Shelly Mogul, Auburn Curriculum Director; and
- 5.) Superintendent Grondin.

\*\*\*\*Remember...The MDOE, having been sold a "bill of goods" by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation is now promoting Nellie Mae's agenda as its own.

Auburn's Curriculum Director, Shelly Mogul currently serves as Co-Chair for the Maine Cohort for Customized Learning (MCCL), an organization whose official mission is "to lead the development, implementation and promotion of customized learning."

The charter of MCCL states:

"The Co-chairs shall be the principal executive officers of the organization. The Co-chair(s) shall preside over all meetings of the Board of Directors, and shall execute on behalf of the organization any official documents or actions required of the organization."

Kind of curious how much "developing" we are doing

Is this why teachers are not allowed to express publicly concern about PBL....our leadership can't afford to admit problems when they are the face of MCCL. Not encouraging when we should be focused on doing what is in the best interest of our students.

I do not blame Superintendent Grondin and others for following the lead of the Maine DOE. They had no way of knowing that the DOE's policy had been influenced so significantly by money. However, now that we know this and we know that the "systems change" is not well supported and is creating issues....Isn't it time to reconsider our motivations....while we all want to see Maine students succeed and improvement in education is always a good thing, even Mr. Gates is learning that it takes more than money to make this happen.

AUBURN:

Has not used Great Schools Partnership....Rather they went the route of Re-Inventing Schools Coalition (RISC) that was created in 2002 and is the Marzano approach,.....Marzano Research and Reinventing School now.

Steve Bowen (Council of State School Officers) (Commissioner of Education between Feb. 2011 and August 2013) was on the advisory board of Competency works, which was affiliated with RISC. Also on the board is David Ruff of Great Schools Partnership, and Charles Toulmin of the Nellie Mae Education Fund. Competency Works supported by Nellie Mae.

STEVE BOWEN

Steve Bowen was in the House of Reps. From 2002-2006 representing Camden and Rockport. Prior to serving in the Legislature, Bowen taught social studies for 10 years. After leaving elected office, Bowen directed the Center for Education Excellence at the [Maine Heritage Policy Center](#). During the [2010 gubernatorial election](#), Bowen served as then candidate [Paul LePage](#)'s policy adviser on education, government reform, budget and marine resources policy.<sup>[1]</sup> LePage won the 2010 election and, in February 2011, newly elected [Governor Paul LePage](#) appointed Bowen Commissioner of Education. In August 2013, Bowen resigned as Education Commissioner effective September 12. Wikipedia

\*\*\*\*I would note that the Maine Heritage Policy Center now stands in opposition to PBL in Maine schools.

Race to the Top Grant: Barack O'Bama's plan:

**Obama's Race to the Top loses all funding in 2015 omnibus spending bill** Washington Post, Valerie Strauss, December 10, 2014.

“The \$4.3 billion-dollar Race to the Top was Obama's main education initiative, [first announced in 2009](#) as an effort to ensure that every student

was “college and career ready” and to achieve “educational equity” by aggressively “turning around” the lowest-performing schools (or by closing them if they didn’t turn around fast enough.) The program was a competition among states for federal funding, with certain stipulations; states (and later districts) had to promise to implement specific school reforms favored by Education Secretary Arne Duncan in order to win the cash. The Gates Foundation awarded millions of dollars to states that sought its help in designing their Race to the Top contest entries. The program became controversial as some critics said it represented federal intrusion into local education (though states were not required to participate) and critics wondered how a competition among states – which would create winners and losers – could create educational equity.

There is also no funding for the [controversial Common Core State Standards](#) in this legislation. The development of the standards and their implementation was not federally funded, though the Obama administration did provide \$360 million to two multi-state consortia that developed new Core-aligned standardized tests, which are being given to students for the first time this school year. That money had been appropriated in previous years. The administration also linked Race to the Top funding to the adoption of common standards; an early version of the first Race competition used the Common Core standards by name but, as my colleague [Lyndsey Layton reported here](#), that was changed out of fear that “some states would consider that unwanted — and possibly illegal — interference from Washington.” In fiscal year 2014, Race to the Top [was given \\$250 million](#), according to this legislation summary, for competitive awards to states to develop or grow early childhood programs for children from low- and moderate-income families. Obama’s fiscal year 2015 budget proposal [included \\$300 million](#) for a proposed “Race to the Top-Equity and Opportunity.” While Race to the Top

gets no funding in the 2015 omnibus bill, the administration's Preschool Development Grants program gets \$250 million for 2015." Washington Post, Valerie Strauss, December 10, 2014."

And of course, Bill Gates \$\$\$ are still at work....

The [Common Core State Standards](#), one set of standards adopted by states for Race to the Top, were developed by the [National Governors Association](#) and the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) with funds from the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), the [Charles Stewart Mott Foundation](#) and others.<sup>[9]</sup> Adoption of the Common Core State Standards, however, was not required by Race to the Top. He did so in order to take a position with the national [Council of Chief State School Officers](#).<sup>!Wikipedia</sup>

**TO: THE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION OF LD 1666**

**FROM: Laura Garcia, 20 Skillings Corner Road, Auburn, Maine**

My name is Laura Garcia. I am the mother of two children in the Auburn School District. They are 11 (6<sup>th</sup> Grade) and 14 (8<sup>th</sup> Grade). I am a native of Maine, educated in the public schools ending with my graduation from the University Of Maine School Of Law. I taught for approximately 5 years at Andover College. In recent years, my focus has been on raising my girls. My oldest daughter's class will be the second class to graduate with a PBD in 2022 from Edward Little.

While I fully support efforts to improve the quality of our schools, I am opposed to Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) and the 1-4 Grading system being used to implement it.

My reasons for opposing Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) and the 1-4 Grading are as follows:

- PBL and 1-4 Grading do not motivate students to do their best work. It teaches them to do only as much as needed to achieve proficiency. One teacher I spoke with said she had never seen students work so hard to fail. She noted that some still had not taken the test she gave this past September. On-line learning or digitalized education may work better at the college level because those who enroll really want to be there to better their situation. Using the current PBL model in the middle school and high school presumes students are developmentally ready to be responsible for their future. It is my belief that students at this point need expectations and boundaries within which to exercise their analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Middle school and high school is where students should be learning to think for themselves and gaining confidence in their ability to be lifelong learners when facing any challenge or issue.
- There is a lack of consistency in application in subject areas. In some classes a student is told that they cannot achieve more than a 2 until the end of the year. Meanwhile, in other subjects the student is told that they can get a 3 and move on. Proponents say that PBL is about proficiency and not time spent in the chair. Individualized learning is what they claim. In reality, under PBL time in the chair is still being measured when a student is not allowed to progress at their pace in some areas. Math may lend itself to the PBL approach, but I cannot see how the language/arts and social sciences are served by PBL. Aren't those disciplines reliant upon class discussions, debates, detours when issues get introduced that weren't anticipated, etc.? Are students allowed to move at their own pace (as claimed)? Or can they graduate early? No. In reality students that want to do their best will be stalled out, bored and getting 3's on a transcript.
- The PBL experts have promised colleges will accept and evaluate a PBD (that lists 3's) and that a student's chances for admission to a college of his/her choice will not be hindered. I disagree strongly. My husband was an admission officer for a competitive school. How is a student to set themselves apart when the standard for everyone is a 3? How is a school to know that a student was the top performer when we will no longer do class rank? Why is competing with other students a bad thing? Imagine if we did the same in sports. The school can have a basketball team, but no varsity or junior varsity. When we play other schools, no score will be kept. After all, isn't it just about one's ability to play basketball? Competition is a reality in life. Why are we sheltering them from that? And can't we encourage individual growth and pathways within a community of peers?

- PBL is reducing education to a “checklist” approach. Are we teaching students how to think, or are we teaching them what to think?
- I am concerned for our districts statewide....what will be the costs over time? An education system that uses technology to this degree will be expensive to maintain and update. Don't they say that with the pace of technology one needs to buy a new computer every few years to be on the cutting edge? With the updating of technology, programs, and software will come the need for consultants and experts. Even now are we prepared to be held hostage to the technology sector? You, the Education Committee, should be asking yourself if we can afford to be in that position. I am in favor of technology as a tool to aid teachers and students alike, but I do not want the computer to be the teacher and I fear that is where we are headed.
- I do not want computers to be the teacher because I believe strongly that teachers, when actively teaching and engaging students individually and as a group, can motivate and inspire students. They can share their enthusiasm for subjects. Instead, we are asking that they track students, input data, and assist students at various levels of achievement. To me, PBL feels like a sanitized and sterile learning environment, especially when a teacher is asked to track several students at one time.
- Having researched the origin and basis for PBL in Maine, I have concluded that we are part of an experiment. Why is valuable teacher and student time being used to iron out issues in a system that was supposed to be “proven” and well established. Enough. The clock is ticking and my daughter is headed into high school. Are we prepared to have a generation of Maine students pay the price for this supposed “reform?” The monies behind this experiment can be largely traced back to the Gates Foundation. Who benefits if education becomes digitalized in our state and the nation? The technology sector stands to benefit.

How did I reach my conclusions? Below, I have related my experiences with PBL and our school district in implementing PBL.

### **ONE PARENT’S TALE OF PBD, PBL AND 1-4 GRADING**

In the late summer of 2016, as my oldest began her middle school career, the Auburn School Department held an informational meeting for parents on “Mass Customized Learning.” While in years past I had heard mention of a pilot program in the schools testing the idea that a student could learn at their own pace on a computer with guidance from a teacher, I knew very little about the education “reform” currently sweeping our state. As an interested and involved parent, I attended this meeting not knowing what to expect. That evening I was officially introduced to Proficiency Based Learning (PBL) (at the time it was referred to as “Mass Customized Learning”(MCL), Proficiency Based Diploma (PBD) and the 1-4 Grading System by the experts who would be guiding the teachers in implementing PBL and the 1-4 Grading.

This is what I recall about that meeting....

**Parents and students were told that Maine law required Mass Customized Learning (MCL) now referred to as Proficiency Based Learning ( In fact, the PBD Law does not mandate PBL and a 1-4 Grading System.)** The facilitators explained with pride that this method of teaching/learning was the wave of the future. They spoke of PBL as an inevitable change and that Maine would be a pioneer in education reform, the first state to require its students to graduate with proficiency based diploma. It

was explained that implementing PBL would take time as teachers and students alike learned the new approach. Focus group would be formed providing opportunities for input from parents and teachers to address concerns iron out difficulties and aid with implementation. We were told that as pioneers, we could not expect all the kinks in the new system to be ironed out immediately. Maine, the facilitators stated, would blaze the trail for a soon to be nationwide movement in education. PBL was described as proven system designed to enhance the student experience and increase learning. I expressed many concerns at the meeting as did other parents. Chief among the complaints was that the new grading system would discourage students from striving for excellence. Parents wondered how teachers would have the time to track the performance of several students, prepare lesson plans and offer individualized assistance to those that experienced difficulties with any given target along their educational journey. To me it felt as though under PBL we would be approaching learning and education as a checklist in various subject areas rather than a comprehensive plan to teach the next generation how to think critically, problem solve, and develop a love of learning.

### **FAST FORWARD TO THE CURRENT 2017-2018 SCHOOL YEAR.....**

I began hearing complaints about problems with EMPOWER and confusion around grading. Why can you get a 4 in some subjects but not others? How come you can move ahead in proficiency in some subjects, like math, but not others? At Auburn Middle School, teachers designated the top 15 students on each academic team. How were the students selected, especially if there are no GPA's? I heard that selection was based on teacher opinions of students and that in some instances petty reasons were given for keeping a student off the top 15 list. Parents report that student motivation is being undermined by the new system. Why try to go above and beyond when you will get the same 3 that the student who does the bare minimum to achieve proficiency? My daughter and her friend completed a project for their social studies class. They worked hard. I told them I hoped they would receive an "A" for their hard work. Their reply was that, "Nope, we can only get a 3." Another parent lamented that her son said "Why work hard, I'm just going to get a 3 like everyone else?" Over time the PBL and 1-4 grading approach erodes motivation. My daughter's report card came home. While the report card looked as though it had a great deal more information than past report cards, it actually provided less. Parents have complained that it is difficult to understand and actually doesn't say much more than "on pace." I have talked to parents who have pulled their students from the public schools because of what they believe to be the drawbacks of PBD, PBL and the 1-4 Grading.

### **PRESENT**

In recent weeks, I have been doing research regarding the PBD Law (LD 1422), PBL and the 1-4 grading system. **MY TARGET.... to know and understand the origin and basis for PBL which was being heralded as a proven system and an inevitable change.**

It has been difficult to get answers. In some respects, my research has led to more questions than answers. However, I have learned enough (using my old fashioned education) to conclude that while PBL may be one thing in theory, it is a completely different animal in practice. Additionally, I now firmly believe that Maine students are part of an experiment funded by entities in the student loan and technology sector. These entities hope to generate a track record of success in Maine so that they can peddle in other states as proof of PBL's inherent value. We are a rural state and education is underfunded in many communities. In light of that, I understand why we have been targeted as a testing ground. I would caution, however, that "nothing in life is free." And sometimes, "things are too good to be true." I found myself asking, who would benefit from a national education system reliant upon computers, technology, software and consultants? The foundations that are leading the charge

for PBL are not benevolent benefactors of our education system. I firmly believe the current initiatives will ultimately fail. However, as the parent of an eighth grader and sixth grader, I fear that my children and their peers will pay the price for this experiment in the next few years.

As a parent, I can research, make observations and draw conclusions about the desirability of PBL and the 1-4 Grading, but our teachers and students are the ones with first hand knowledge of this "experiment."

**Teachers in the Auburn School District have been warned not to discuss publicly or openly difficulties or concerns they may have around PBL and the new grading system. I am disheartened and disappointed in an administration that seeks to chill the First Amendment rights of its teachers rather than lead them through a daunting and challenging reform while they continue to teach. Many teachers are afraid to come forward with concerns. Additionally, the silencing of the teachers makes it difficult for parents and teachers to discuss and collaborate on difficulties with PBL, 1-4 Grading, and Empower.** I suspect Auburn teachers are not alone in this experience. Is this the climate we want in our schools?

A group of concerned parents have been circulating a petition requesting a public forum from the Superintendent's Office and School Committee on PBL, PBD and the new grading system. Teachers have declined to sign for fear of reprisal. How do we do what is in the best interest of our students if parents and teachers cannot discuss problems and collaborate on solutions?

## **CONCLUSION**

I am reminded of something my father once told me. He worked for 30 years for social security. He talked about the fact that prior to computers, one would sit down with an applicant for benefits and hear their story. Computers, he said, while making the process more efficient, did not necessarily make the process more effective. Computers required that one fit within a certain category. There was little room for judgment or variables of circumstance in evaluating one's case. You checked a box in evaluating one's claim, rather than listening and recognizing the unique aspects of one's story. Checking a box doesn't tell the story. I would submit that PBL falls short of allowing students an individualized education. In fact, it does just the opposite. In seeking uniformity in efficiency and uniformity in education, we are robbing it of the unique lessons it can afford students along the way. We are asking students to jump through hoops rather than reach for the stars.

Finally, at the end of my daughter's 7<sup>th</sup> grade year and before the implementation of PBL, I attended an award ceremony at her school. One teacher spoke about "85 students, 85 different ways." This teacher is the teacher that I always hear about from my daughter and from others, her friends and their parents. He motivates and inspires his students. He clearly understands that teaching students requires connecting with them on a personal level. Students in his class, regardless of their ability, work hard because they want to please him. I have yet to see a computer, rubrics and clearly defined targets accomplish the same thing. Striving for conformity and consistency in standards, PBL reduces education to a formula/checklist. Do we want our schools to be proficiency factories producing nuggets of knowledge for consumption or do we want to build the car?

I respectfully request that the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs do what is best for our students. Repeal the Proficiency Based Diploma Law (L.D. 1422). Give control back to the local districts so that they can fashion an education plan tailored to meet the needs of the students they serve.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Laura Garcia

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## FUN FACTS on NELLIE MAE EDUCATION FOUNDATION and its affiliated organization GREAT SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP:

1.) Nellie Mae became the Nellie Mae Education Foundation in 2001. Their website designates "our future" being identified in 2008-2010 as "education systems change."

\*\*\*As of 2010 they had fine tuned their purpose to "promoting integration of student-centered" approaches (look out here comes PBL).

2.) 2016 Financials show that the the President and CEO made \$452,657 as a salary from Nellie Mae. He also received approximately \$66,034 from "other compensation from the organization and related organizations." Nellie Mae's conflict of interest policy admits that a majority of its members are affiliated with organizations that may benefit from awarded grants. In other words, there is a community of individuals that are committed to this "reform" and an industry of consulting and developing proficiency based learning has grown up around it.

3.) The Great Schools Partnership was founded in 2008 to "redesign public education."

4.) Between 2010-2017...Nellie Mae awarded between \$7-8 Million in grants to Great Schools Partnership, most of which is devoted to developing and assisting schools with proficiency based learning initiatives, here and in other states.

5.) Visit the website of Great Schools Partnership and take a look at their client list. They provide district coaching and strategic planning, school coaching, grant administration and technical assistance in schools and districts all across the state. In fact, the majority of their clients are Maine schools. It serves them two fold...helps to implement the "vision" and data sources for Nellie Mae and the Gates Foundation and provides their livelihood.

6.) Much of the grant money that Nellie Mae gave to the Great Schools Partnership was focused on the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), which has the same address as Great Schools Partnership, for the purpose of effecting the "redesign."

7.) Mr. Ruff, the executive director of Great Schools Partnership, is also a founding member and director of the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC). It says on the GSP website that he has led NESSC from efforts in Maine, expanding across New England and the nation. (others have used unsuspecting and hospitable Maine to enter the country....which also lead to disastrous results).