Victory Report: How to Create a Consensus for Education Reform in a State

How the Maine Education Initiative Pushed for Better School Systems

Executive Summary

Americans broadly agree that the nation's public schools are in a state of rapid decline. Reading scores have plummeted to the lowest levels ever recorded, and only about a quarter of citizens express confidence in the public school system.

Agreement on the diagnosis, however, does not mean agreement on the remedy. Advancing reform without public support is unsustainable. A governor's mandate in Virginia, a legislative fix in Vermont, a court order in New Mexico, and a state takeover in Rhode Island have all proven insufficient to reform schools. These attempts have shown that raw political power cannot substitute for a public consensus carefully educated to support a true reformist program.

The model for building that public consensus is the Maine Education Initiative (MEI), the education-reform effort of the Maine Policy Institute (MPI).

> ***Over the last several years, MEI has managed to cultivate public support for education reform in a hostile environment where the state's government, media, and school system are wedded to the establishment narrative.***

MEI does this through original research documenting the reasons for school decline (using the state's own data), a media arm that broadcasts that research and generates attention, and a school board educational program that strategically turns the resulting public support into local governing power.

This approach is already working. Although MEI has been operating for less than two years, the state's education establishment has begun to concede parts of its argument, and several districts have adopted MEI's model policies.

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