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**Expert: Education revamp could  
save state \$133 million**

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If the state were to adopt 13 sweeping changes recommended by a panel of well-known educators, Maine taxpayers could save \$133 million over five years, according to a preliminary analysis. David Silvernail of the Center for Education Policy, Applied Research and Evaluation presented the rough estimate to the Maine Board of Education on Wednesday.

Silvernail was asked to analyze the cost of recommendations issued by the 15-member Select Panel on Revisioning Education in Maine. The panel was set up to fulfill a mandate requiring the education board to adopt policies and goals every five years for educating Maine children.

Many of the recommendations rely on consolidation to trim escalating education costs in the face of declining enrollments. They include statewide collective bargaining for all teachers, taking the job away from local districts.

The recommendations won a lukewarm reception from many educators, including Maine's teacher unions and proponents of local control, when they were presented last year. Other major proposals include:

- Reducing Maine's 286 school districts to 35.
- Funding only large school construction projects.
- Financing pre-kindergarten for all 4-year-olds.
- Lengthening the school year.
- Increasing Maine's teacher-student ratio.
- Creating \$200 mutual fund college education accounts for every child born in Maine.
- Picking up half of the tuition for low-income, in-state Maine community college students.

Silvernail said all 13 recommendations would cost the state about \$744 million but bring about \$878 million savings, with a net savings of \$133 million after five years. However, he cautioned, it is very difficult to predict the real cost of the recommendations.

Trustee board chairman James Carignan of Harpswell will present Silvernail's findings to the select panel Friday, which will use the analysis to further refine its recommendations for adoption by the state education board later this year. The board will use the recommendations as a blueprint for action by the Legislature.

Carignan said Silvernail's analysis showed that the recommendations are financially feasible. Other board members had little comment.

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