

Michael Dixon

I hold the following degrees and credentials (Candidates must hold an active 093 Certificate from the Maine DOE):

PhD, 093, Licensed Psychologist

How long have you been a member of MASP?

Since 2015.

Please provide a brief summary of your professional experience.

I moved to Maine in 1974 in order to complete an internship at Tri-County Mental Health Services, and aside from my dissertation year, 1976-77, I have since been a resident of Maine. I was licensed as a Psychological Examiner in 1975, and as a Psychologist in 1978. After completing my doctoral degree, I took a full-time job with Tri-County in late-1977, and worked in that agency's Children's Services program for several years, and gradually started a private practice in Lewiston, which became a full-time practice in 1984.

I began working in Maine schools in 1975, and have since continued that work as an important part of my practice. I have held the 093 certification from the Maine Department of Education as long as that certification has been available, first as a School Psychological Service Provider, and then as a School Psychologist. My work as a School Psychologist was mostly as a contracted service provider, but for the last three years of my working career, as a full time employee of an RSU. At age 75, I am mostly retired from remunerative practice. Instead I have devoted the last few years to volunteering in state professional organizations. I currently serve on the Maine Association of School Psychologists' Government and Professional Relations and Nominations and Election Committees. In the Maine Psychological Association, I am active on the Legislative Committee, and the Community Engagement and Social Justice Committee. Last year, a colleague and I started MePA's first Special Interest Group, in the area of School Practice.

Other important non-professional roles I have played in my life have been in pursuit of appropriate land use and environmental protection, which have led me to at times serve on comprehensive plan update committees and the Zoning Boards of Appeal as a citizen of both Auburn and Lewiston; and as a Board of Director member, Treasurer, and Newsletter Editor for the Taylor Pond Association. I have a life-long passion for popular music, which has at times led to gigs as a publicist (North Atlantic Blues Festival), music journalist, and community disc jockey (Bates College radio station). My most important and meaningful roles have been as a husband and the father of two daughters, who as adults work in health care in Central Maine).

How would you describe your leadership style?

I would describe my approach to leadership as being democratic and collaborative; strategic, by incorporating vision, designation of responsibilities based on individual strengths, and clear goal-setting and mapping; and achieving consensus through a transparent, ethical interactive process which encourages member engagement and involvement, all while working with those outside our organization who have a stake in what we as school psychologist do and accomplish. I firmly believe in applying scientific analysis and evidence-based procedures in developing policy

and practice.

Please write a brief statement indicating why you are interested in serving as President of MASP.

I have been concerned that School Psychologists in Maine are not always recognized as the behavioral health providers we are, providers whose responsibilities are primarily to the students we serve. Those we serve should not be limited to a particular group of students, but to any and all students whose educational needs are not being met. It concerns me that Maine has been on the losing end of some legal cases for not providing students with what they need. Additionally, we need to do our part to make sure that all students receive evidence-based instruction in all core subjects, and that they also are taught the critical thinking and pro-social skills required to become good citizens and lifelong learners once their public school years are over.

I also would add that I have enjoyed working with our current president, Lisa Backman, with our current past-president, Ruth Crowell, and with our NASP delegate, Mary MacLennan, and I do not see that changing, no matter the results of this election. Also, the EB in its current incarnation has done very good work on behalf of its members, including setting up the MASP Mini-Series in Early Childhood Assessment, a nine-session online course which will run weekly on Mondays from 4 to 5:30p.m., starting on September 11, 2023. I would recommend every SP who works in an elementary school setting take this course, in order to ready themselves for the time when SAUs assume the responsibility of Maine's Pre-K education.

A couple of other noteworthy offerings from MASP are its two peer support/consultation programs, one being offered by Membership Committee Chair Danielle Williams, and the other by USM Rep/Civility Committee Chair Garry Wickerd. Finally, I would also give kudos to the committee chairs under whom I serve, Kathy Gillis (GPR) and Jim Babcock, (N&E) for their work.

What do you believe the top three priorities of MASP should be going forward?

1) How can MASP contribute to improving the services that our students receive, while funding the costs of education?

I have been studying this issue for years, and the MaineCare in Education program has never worked. It has been time-consuming for school personnel to prepare documentation, and MaineCare payments received have been offset by a lowering of allocations of other state funding, or subjected to demands for return by MaineCare. Plus, there is no coverage for services performed by specialist level S.P.s, not even for the required IDEA testing they perform. But if schools were allowed to receive MaineCare reimbursement for these services, plus for other behavioral health services which do not require IDEA identification but are still covered by MaineCare, it would bring millions of dollars of Medicaid funding into the state. Our DHHS and DOE need to work together and with the legislature to make changes to our policies and regulations that will allow this money to start flowing into the state. It is not really clear to me that Specialist level SPs need their own licensure board, but if that is the only way to accomplish our being viewed as full-fledged behavioral health providers whose services are eligible for MaineCare reimbursement, then MASP should submit its own bill to accomplish that in the 2nd session of the 131st Legislature.

2) How can MASP help address the significant shortage of school psychologists in Maine? Maine has a marketable brand, and we need to ensure that early career S.P.s who have been trained in other states are able to receive the supervision they require in order to become permanently licensed in Maine.

3) How can MASP help improve the basic education that our students receive?

MASP needs to make sure that evidence-based and scientifically sound methods of instruction are being used to teach skills at all levels of instruction, and also that we work to attract School Psychologist trainees who are willing to practice in under-served geographical areas of the State, or who are members of an under-served population with an interest in becoming an S.P.

What are some ways in which you believe MASP can improve service to members?

My thought here is that MASP must use the power of its status as the primary organization representing school psychologists in order to address some inequities, particularly for those who are employees of their SAUs. Items I would include here are that S.P.s should not be asked to sign contracts that are designed for teachers, even though we stand in solidarity with teachers who are working hard to foster learning in our students. S.P.s are not gatekeepers, but are very qualified professionals who can assist administrators and various assistance teams in evaluating and addressing student needs, and in designing, implementing and assessing interventions. S.P.s do not “belong” to special education, and though we may work closely with SPED directors, we need to maintain our autonomy from them, and make sure we are viewed as a resource of general education, as well. Also, I sometimes wonder if we should be part of a larger unionized group of school-based health and behavioral health workers.