



Testimony of Rita Furlow
Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
LD 1332
An Act to Establish the Community Schools Success Fund to Ensure
the Implementation and Success of Community Schools Programs
April 8, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am providing testimony in support of LD 1332, *An Act to Establish the Community Schools Success Fund to Ensure the Implementation and Success of Community Schools Programs*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

Supporting Maine's children is essential for our state's future prosperity. Research on brain development reveals that children's early experiences shape the brain's architecture, providing a strong or weak foundation for future learning, behavior, and health. Moreover, chronic stressors like poverty, domestic violence, or abuse and neglect can cause toxic stress, hindering development and impairing children's ability to meet developmental and educational milestones necessary for success.

We've been a long-time supporter of the Community School model because it recognizes the interconnectedness of all domains of development—cognitive, social, emotional, and physical. This model emphasizes the holistic development of the whole child and adopts a systemic, collaborative approach to meet the diverse needs of every child.

One of the Community School model's strengths lies in its focus on collaboration and the numerous transitions children experience in their lives. By partnering with community organizations like early childhood programs, after-school activities, youth recreation centers, and social service agencies, schools can connect children to additional resources tailored to their unique needs. This collaborative approach fosters stronger relationships with parents and addresses issues that impact both schools and partners, such as absenteeism.

We support the bill's provision that establishes a "Community Schools Success Fund," a non-renewable fund dedicated to supporting the Community School model. This fund would not only provide financial assistance but also aid in professional development, assessments, and mentoring to help schools effectively implement the model.

By working together to support the needs of Maine children, we can secure a prosperous future for our state. Community Schools is a practical and effective approach to ensuring that all children in Maine have access to the resources they need to thrive. This model can open doors to the broader community for children and families by building capacity, energy, and optimism for the future of Maine students.

Thank you for your consideration.