

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Testimony of Julie Smyth, Director of the Office of Student and School Supports, Department of Education

Neither For Nor Against: L.D. 1527

An Act to Promote the Community School Program

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Brennan

Co-Sponsored by: Senators Ingwersen, Rafferty, and Rafferty, and Representatives Dodge, Gattine, Malon, Perry, Shagoury, Perry and Sargent

Date: May 1, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Julie Smyth, and I am here today representing the Department speaking neither for nor against L.D. 1527, An Act to Promote the Community School Program proposes to develop an application process and criteria for implementing the requirements of Community Schools and would also provide one-time funding to expand the Community School Program.

A community school is a public elementary or secondary school that participates in a community-based effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships. It also provides access to those services to students and their families. The Department's authority to designate and to provide funding for 5 community schools was initially established by the First Regular Session of the 127th Legislature. The additional funding that would be provided by this bill would allow existing community schools to expand their programs to more comprehensive services and allow other interested communities to access the necessary funding to begin developing their community school plan.

The community school model is an evidence-based, effective strategy to coordinate and align school and community resources and increase family and community engagement for our students' success. The community school strategy is intended to adapt to the unique needs and context of the individual community. While there may be certain standard components and practices, each student, family, school, and community has different priorities.

The Department would like to note that since the 2021-2022 school year statute allows the Department to biannually designate 10 additional community schools. In order for the Department to expend and disburse the funds allocated by LD 1527, Title 20-A, §9923 will need to be amended to eliminate the biannual restriction on the number of schools that may be established. At that point, Title 20-A §15689-A, which already authorizes the Department to

expend and disburse targeted funds, would enable the Department to implement the work outlined in LD 1527.

Congress has demonstrated its strong support for community schools by doubling the funding last year from \$75 million to \$150 million with the Full-Service Community Schools Expansion Act (S. 385/HR 1241 from the 117th Congress). In conjunction with the Federal funds, the funds in this bill will support the expansion of Community Schools to reach the communities that have shown the need and demand for this evidence-based strategy for reducing barriers that impact our students' access to education.

For these reasons, the Department of Education is neither for nor against L.D. 1527, An Act to Promote the Community School Program and will be available for work sessions on this bill.