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Testimony of Representative Michael Brennan introducing
LD 1527, An Act to Promote the Community School Program
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and fellow distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Michael Brennan, and I represent House District 115, which includes a portion of Portland. I am here to introduce **LD 1527, An Act to Promote the Community School Program**.

The intent of this bill is to dramatically expand the Community Schools Program in Maine. The legislation provides \$2 million in each of the next two years to support the program.

Why is this important at this time?

According to the recently-released Maine Kids Count Report, "Public education is foundational to our society. The pandemic created significant stressors for children, including disruptions in their education as well as increased social isolation and stress. Children need us to invest in their futures."

The report recommends that the state, "Expand the Community Schools' Programs including after-school tutoring and extended day schooling."

In addition to tutoring and extended day learning programs, a community school would be able to contract with community agencies to provide a broad array of services including mental health, substance use, housing and income security benefits.

The report goes on to provide a "hypothetical classroom of 25 first graders in Maine." This "classroom" clearly demonstrates the demographics and issues that students bring each day to the classroom. To provide these students and families the support they need, it is important that we mobilize community resources in a coordinated fashion.

Each day, we are confronting the implications of COVID-19. While some aspects of the virus may be less prevalent, the collateral impact has not been fully addressed.

However, almost every social issue discussed by this committee during the past two years could have a robust response if this legislation were to be enacted.

By embracing the Community Schools Program, we can embark on a new era of community school partnerships for the benefit of school staff, students and families.

Finally, I am suggesting that the committee include the following language change:

1527 Community Schools Bill Language Changes: The limit on the number of community schools needs to be eliminated in order for us to be able to implement the bill.

§9923. Designation of community schools

The department is authorized to designate 3 community schools established in accordance with this chapter beginning in the 2016-2017 school year. For the 2020-2021 school year, the department is authorized to designate 5 community schools established in accordance with this chapter. Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, the department may biannually designate ~~10~~ additional community schools established in accordance with this chapter. The department shall annually inform school administrative units of the application process and deadlines and make that information and appropriate forms available on its publicly accessible website. The commissioner shall provide state funding to the school administrative units in which the designated community schools are located and may employ a state community school coordinator to implement this designation program.



Solutions

Public education is foundational to our society. The pandemic created significant stressors for children, including disruptions in their education, as well as increased social isolation and stress.²⁴ Children need us to invest in their futures. Policy recommendations include:

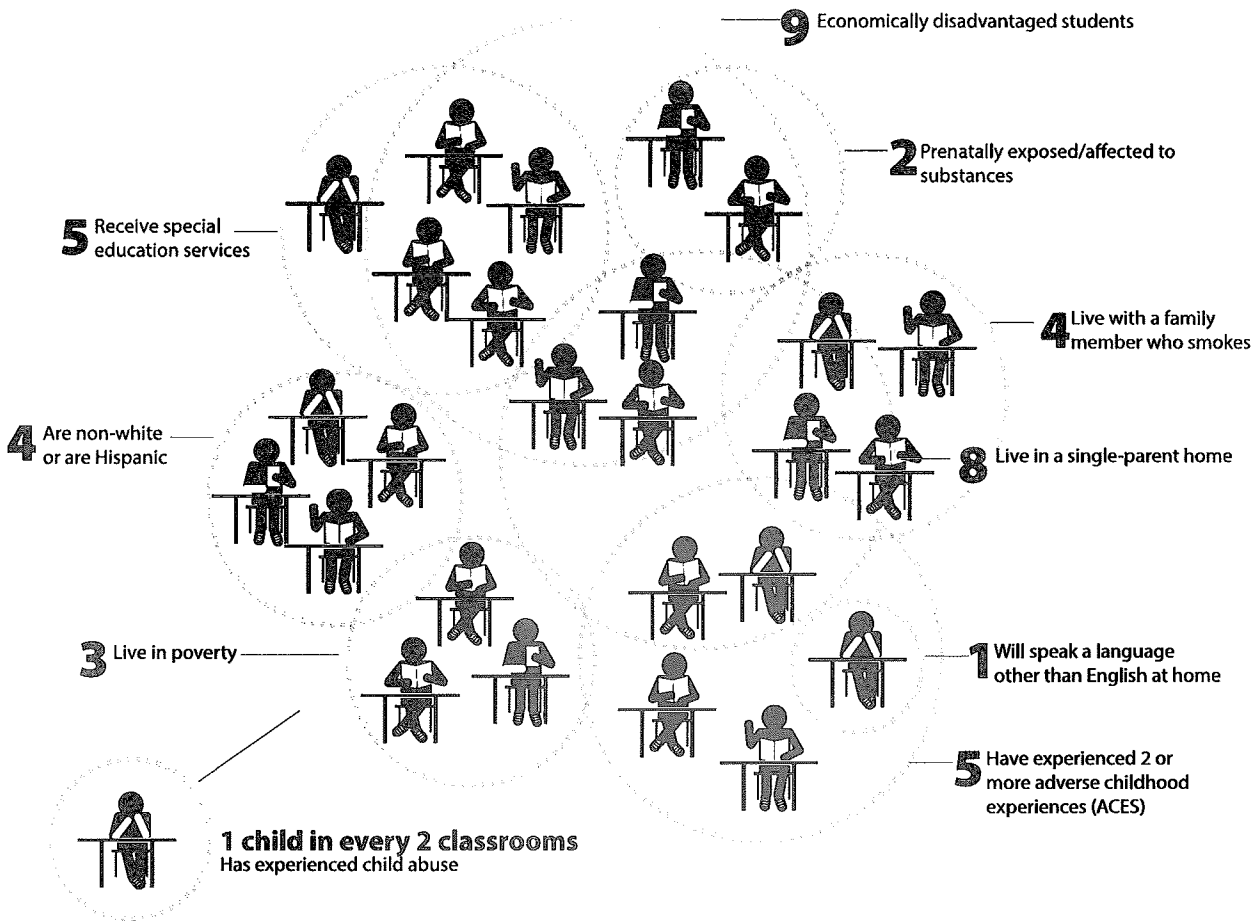
- ✓ Increase investments in the early care and education system, including incentivizing a mixed delivery system that includes public and private child care partnerships and Head Start.
- ✓ Increase investments in school districts to provide full-day, full-week preschool and to increase outreach to families about the benefits of enrolling.
- ✓ Help school districts improve school climate and inclusion of youth who face more discrimination and bullying, such as LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color.
- ✓ Increase investment in teacher compensation and teacher retention.
- ✓ Maintain the state's obligation to provide 55 percent of the cost of preschool and K-12 education.
- ✓ Strengthen school and community-based children's mental health services.
- ✓ Expand the Community Schools' programs including after-school tutoring and extended day schooling.

Additional Indicators

- › All parents of children under age 6 in the workforce by Maine county, KIDS COUNT
- › Children Served: Number of Children with Open Subsidy Authorization by Age Group, Maine Office of Child and Family Services
- › Head Start Enrollment, KIDS COUNT
- › Children receiving early intervention services by state ages 0-1 and ages 0-3 Child Count Data Charts, IdealInfantToddler.org
- › Right From the Start Maine Coalition Indicators, Multiple indicators from KIDS COUNT
- › Profile of English Language learners in Maine, Maine Department of Education
- › State of Maine Profile of Reading and Math Proficiency of fourth and eighth graders, (NAEP) Nations Report Card and Fourth-grade reading achievement levels, and Eighth-grade math achievement levels, KIDS COUNT
- › Characteristics of Maine students enrolled in special education, Maine Department of Education
- › College starting within 12 months of graduating high school, KIDS COUNT
- › Students completing a two-year degree or four degree within 6 years of graduating high school, KIDS COUNT



A HYPOTHETICAL CLASSROOM OF 25 FIRST GRADERS IN MAINE



Title 20-A: EDUCATION
Part 4: SPECIFIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS
Subpart 3: OTHER PROGRAMS
Chapter 333: COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

§9922. Establishment of a community school

Beginning October 1, 2015, a school board may designate an existing school or establish a new school as a community school. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

1. Community school plan goals. A community school shall collaborate with community partners to provide services to students, families and community members that promote student success while addressing the needs of the whole student. A school board may designate or establish a community school as long as the community school plan developed by the school board is consistent with the following goals:

A. Improving student learning and development by providing support for students to enable them to graduate college-ready and career-ready; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

B. Improving the coordination and integration, accessibility and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for students attending high-poverty schools, including high-poverty rural schools; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

C. Enabling educators and school personnel to complement and enrich efforts to improve academic achievement and other results related to student learning and development; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

D. Ensuring that children have the physical, social and emotional well-being to come to school ready to engage in the learning process every day; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

E. Promoting and enabling family and community engagement in the education of children; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

F. Enabling more efficient use of federal, state, local and private sector resources that serve children and families; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

G. Facilitating the coordination and integration of programs and services operated by community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations and state, local and tribal governments; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

H. Engaging students as resources for their communities; and [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

I. Engaging the business community and other community organizations as partners. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

2. Audit. Following the designation or establishment of a community school, but prior to the opening of a community school, a school board shall conduct:

A. A community needs audit to identify the academic, physical, social, emotional, health, mental health and civic needs of students and their families that may affect student learning and academic achievement; [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

B. A community resource assessment of potential resources, services and opportunities available within or near the community that students, families and community members may access and integrate into the community school; and [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

C. For an existing school that has been designated as a community school, an operations and instructional audit. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

3. Plan. A school board shall develop a community school plan for each school designated or established as a community school.

A. When developing a community school plan for the establishment of a new community school, the school board shall use the results of the community resource assessment under subsection 2, paragraph B (./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html) to address the specific needs identified in the community needs audit under subsection 2, paragraph A (./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html). [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

B. When developing a community school plan for the designation of an existing school as a community school, the school board shall use the results of the community resource assessment under subsection 2, paragraph B (./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html) to address the specific needs identified in the community needs audit under subsection 2, paragraph A (./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html) and the operations and instructional audit under subsection 2, paragraph C (./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html). [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

C. A community school plan must coordinate, integrate and enhance services for students, families and community members at the community school to improve the academic achievement of students and increase family and community involvement in education. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

D. A community school plan must include cost estimates or an operational budget for the specified educational, developmental, family, health and other comprehensive services to be provided by the community school. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

E. When developing a community school plan for the establishment of a new community school, a school board shall designate a community school coordinator to manage the partnerships with community partners participating in the community school plan. [PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

[PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

4. Funding. The commissioner may provide state funding to the school administrative units in which community schools are located pursuant to section 15689-A, subsection 25 (./20-A/title20-Asec15689-A.html). In providing funds under this subsection, the commissioner shall give priority to a qualified school administrative unit in which at least 40% of the students are economically disadvantaged students as determined pursuant to section 15675, subsection 2 (./20-A/title20-Asec15675.html) and that has more economically disadvantaged students than other qualified school administrative units under this subsection.

[PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

5. Gifts, grants and donations. A school administrative unit may seek and accept public and private gifts, grants and donations to offset the costs of developing and implementing a community school plan under subsection 3 ([./20-A/title20-Asec9922.html](https://www.maine.gov/legis/20-A/title20-Asec9922.html)). A gift, grant or donation received pursuant to this subsection must be approved by the school board prior to the receipt of the gift, grant or donation.

[PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 2015, c. 267, Pt. GGG, §1 (NEW).

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Our View: Child welfare report should light a fire under Maine

pressherald.com/2023/04/30/our-view-child-welfare-report-should-light-a-fire-under-maine/

By The Editorial Board

April 30, 2023

A lot of kids in America are struggling right now. In Maine, the situation is no different.

Although a number of reasons have been floated in recent years, none are by themselves satisfactory. Depression and anxiety are on the rise. Social media can be isolating and demoralizing, but the overall effect on kids is far from clear. COVID-19 disrupted young lives in unprecedented ways, but the problems for kids started well before the pandemic.

Rather than argue over the cause, we should focus on the available solutions. We should do the things we know support children and their families – and give them the best chance to overcome obstacles and live fulfilling lives.

It's hard to think of a more important task for our communities and at every level of government. A new report from the Maine Children's Alliance shows why.

THE PROBLEM AT HAND

Throughout its 2023 Kids Count data book, the public policy and advocacy nonprofit paints a dire picture of the welfare of Maine's young people. More than third of high school students in our state report feeling sad or hopeless. Self-harm is on the rise, too, as is suicidal ideation.

Although the decline in youth mental health began years ago, the pandemic made it much worse. The academic, social and emotional loss has been profound. Students who missed two years of in-person instruction are not only understandably behind on their studies, many are also struggling with how to behave and interact with others in school.

And though the pandemic was hard on everyone, as the existing inequities in K-12 education were made more stark, it was particularly hard on students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

That includes a very large number of Maine kids. About 34,000 children in Maine live in poverty – the threshold is a meager \$27,740 a year for a family of four – with all the pressures and disadvantages that poverty brings. Thousands more are in families that hover just above that poverty threshold, and have all the same challenges.

Simply put, they are not in a good position to succeed.

Neither are kids who spend the first few years of their lives in unstable or abusive homes — years that will have an influence on them for the rest of their lives. More than 4,200 kids in Maine suffered maltreatment in 2021, an increase of 30% since 2017. In

2020, our rate of child maltreatment was more than double the national average.

These are devastating numbers. But by stepping in and giving vulnerable children and their families necessary resources and tools, we can make things better.

WHAT WE CAN DO

We can start right at the beginning and ensure that Maine families experiencing hardship have access to state support before a child is born. Not only does pre- and post-natal support lead to better health outcomes for mother and child, it also helps identify kids at risk of neglect or abuse, making early intervention possible.

When the editorial board met with leadership from the Department of Health and Human Services earlier this year, we were encouraged to hear that its Office of Child and Family Services was sharpening its focus on early intervention as part of the response to the unacceptable increase in child deaths in Maine. The importance of that labor-intensive work, and the appropriate funding of it, cannot be overstated.

We can also lift more people out of poverty by protecting Maine's minimum wage. If anything, it should be raised.

The expanded federal child tax credit put in place during the pandemic, which gave many families much-needed relief, has not been renewed. With abundant proof of the good it did for low-income families, it should be. Maine should also pass its own version. There's now a bill before the Legislature that would do just that.

The state also has to urgently close the gaps in the child mental health system, so kids can get care when they need it. It needs to support its child care industry and create a paid leave program, so parents can support their kids both financially and emotionally.

Finally, we need to continue to make investments in our schools and housing, so that families have access to health care and healthy food, so that the rising cost of living doesn't push more and more Mainers into financial distress.

Maine kids are hurting. Let's give their families and their communities the chance to help.

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