

Testimony of Dave Burgess in Support of Funding for BARR Program Training Completion

To: Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

From: Dave Burgess

Date: February 20, 2026

RE: Support for funding the remaining training cycles for BARR schools

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding the remaining training costs for Maine schools currently involved in the three year training cycle for the Building Assets Reducing Risk school improvement model.

My name is Dave Burgess, and I am a resident of Orland, Maine, a parent of a student who graduated from Bucksport High School, a BARR School, and I have been a School Board member for RSU 25 since 2009. I am here today to strongly urge the committee to include funding in the supplemental budget for the completion of the three-year BARR (Building Assets, Reducing Risks) training cycles for 37 Maine schools.

I have experienced BARR both as a parent and as a School Board member and I know the BARR framework made a significant impact on Bucksport High School and improved the outcomes and experiences of Bucksport High School for my son as well as the rest of the students since it was first implemented at Bucksport in 2010. Since the introduction of the BARR framework to Bucksport High School there have been improved student outcomes, reduction in course failures, increased graduation rates, reduced dropout rates, and an overall improvement in school culture. As a parent I saw improved communication from the school, and the weekly BARR meetings with the grade level teams made sure no student was overlooked or slipped through the cracks. The teachers work together to support the needs of all students and to develop intentional, positive relationships with students and parents.

As a Board member, I have been pleased with the significant increase in graduation rates and a significant reduction in the dropout rates since the inception of the BARR framework. The BARR model is not an add on for our high school, BARR is a center piece of what we do and how we operate the high school. So much so when hiring, administration or teachers, we make sure candidates understand BARR is an expectation and not an option. BARR is part of our district's culture, with the expansion of BARR to our middle school in 2014, and our elementary school beginning in 2025.

As a parent, my expectations of my son's high school experience was for him to take advantage of the opportunities available at the school. By reducing the course failure rate in the freshman and sophomore levels, the students stayed on track and did not have to make up failed courses. Having a solid academic foundation as well as having a positive school culture with teachers with whom he had positive relationships provided an environment that allowed my son to flourish.

As you consider the supplemental budget, I ask you to view this as a "completion fund." This is not a request for a new experiment—it is a request to finish the work already started. Let's ensure these 28 schools cross the finish line next year, and these 9 schools stay on track to reach full sustainability.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maine's students and educators.

Respectfully,
Dave Burgess