

Scott Tombleson - Testimony in support of funding the BARR Model in Maine February 20th, 2026

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,

My name is Scott Tombleson, and I am the proud principal of Kennebunk High School in RSU21. I am here today to urge you to support the continued funding of the implementation of the BARR model in Maine schools. I ask this because it is already producing measurable improvement for the students of Kennebunk High School in just a few short months, and I am confident that a similar impact is being seen at other schools implementing BARR in Maine.

I've seen the positive impact of BARR first hand at a school in Massachusetts and since then, I have looked for any opportunity to bring this powerful approach to the school communities which I've had the privilege to serve here in Maine. I couldn't be happier to have found that opportunity this year at Kennebunk High School.

BARR is not just a slogan. It is a structured and systematic way for teachers to work as a team around the same group of students using shared data, weekly routines, and clear follow-through, so students are known well and supported early, before small problems calcify and become chronic.

Since implementing BARR this year, our 9th grade chronic absenteeism rate, meaning students missing 10% or more of school days, has dropped from 23.3% last year to only 13.0% this year. That is a 10.3 percentage point decrease, representing a 44% overall reduction in chronic absenteeism.

We are also seeing improvement in academic performance. The percentage of 9th graders with one or more D or F in the first semester dropped from a three year average of 28.7% to only 21.3% this year. This represents a 7.4 percentage point decrease, and a relative reduction of nearly 26%. Again, we just started implementing BARR at Kennebunk High School in September of 2025.

These gains come from adults working in a disciplined, aligned way. BARR builds the collective responsibility and efficacy that schools need to move outcomes, and it does it with a structure that is practical and doable for schools.

I urge you to fund the continuation and indeed expansion of BARR in Maine schools. This funding would support the training, coaching, and protected collaboration time required to implement the program with fidelity. Without this support, I fear our work will slide back into fragmentation and we would lose the positive progress that Kennebunk High School, along with the other schools in Maine implementing BARR have seen.

Respectfully submitted,
Scott Tombleson