

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 Monique Poulin, and I serve as the assistant superintendent for RSU 9. I am here today to strongly urge your continued support and funding for the Building Assets, Reducing Risks—or BARR—model in Maine schools.

In a district of 2,300 students, consistency is paramount and one of our primary goals. Implementation science shows that embedding evidence-based practices is a multi-year journey, and in RSU 9, our commitment to this timeline has fostered a genuine cycle of growth. This success was driven by BARR coaching and specialized resources that helped our staff move from merely "learning a model" to "living it." This expert scaffolding shifted our professional culture, aligning with our goal of the opportunity for equitable outcomes for every student.

To share a specific example, since one of our elementary schools began implementing the BARR model in 2023, we have seen undeniable results. Chronic absenteeism at that school has decreased by an average of 14.4 percent. Ultimately, these results validate a core educational necessity: consistent attendance is the prerequisite for all meaningful student learning. However, this data point only tells half of the story. Through the 'Big Block' and 'Small Block' models, our staff reports higher morale and a shared ownership of student success. This progress reflects the core mission of BARR: Same students. Same teachers. Better results. We have achieved this by simply changing the way we support one another within the existing system.

One of our BARR team members recently shared an example that illustrates why this connected structure matters. We had a family with two children in two different elementary schools who were experiencing unstable housing. One child showed emotional dysregulation, while the other became more withdrawn. In a traditional system, these two schools might have created separate, overlapping plans, unintentionally overwhelming a parent who was already in survival mode.

Because of the BARR 'Community Connect' teams and the shared vocabulary across our district, we were able to coordinate one thoughtful, aligned response. This is just one example of the model in action; it is a consistent structure that allows our staff to recognize patterns early and respond in a coordinated way for any family in any circumstance.

It is important to emphasize that while the Community Connect team is a vital component, it is only one piece of the entire BARR structure. This model provides the professional learning and collaborative

culture necessary to ensure that every student—not just those in crisis—is known, supported, and challenged to succeed.

When our staff works together through the BARR structure to reduce barriers to school engagement, our Maine students are better able to grow academically and personally. By addressing these foundational needs proactively, our students are better equipped to work towards thriving in school and beyond.

When I was first hesitant in a former district to embrace BARR, my concern was about asking staff to incorporate 'one more thing.' A colleague who had been working with BARR since its entry into Maine called me and clearly explained and emphasized, "It is not one more thing... it is THE thing." We agree. For RSU 9, BARR is "the thing" that helps us to move forward collaboratively and consistently with the mission and vision of our district strategic plan.

We are forever grateful to the Maine Department of Education and the State of Maine for the allocation of ESSER resources to support this implementation. We ask that you continue this investment so we and other districts in Maine do not lose the momentum built through this vital work.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the students of Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

Monique Poulin