

## **Testimony of James Boothby in Support of Funding the Remaining Cost of BARR Training February 20, 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, 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 (BARR) school improvement model.

My name is James Boothby. I am a resident of Ellsworth, Maine; a retired superintendent of schools; currently the Executive Director of the Penobscot River Educational Service Center; and a BARR Ambassador. I am in my thirty-fifth year working in Maine education, having served as a teacher, coach, middle school assistant principal, elementary principal, high school principal, and for nineteen years as a superintendent of schools.

I am here today to offer my strong support for funding that will allow schools currently engaged in BARR training to complete the full three-year implementation cycle. Importantly, this request is limited and strategic—focused only on schools already participating. Specifically, this funding is critical for 28 Maine schools entering their final year and 9 Maine schools entering their second year of the three-year implementation cycle, so that those already committed can finish the process and realize the full benefits of the model. The cost for FY 2027 would be \$2,960,000 and for FY 2028 \$640,000, for a total of \$3,600,000.

The BARR model is not a “one-off” workshop; it is a proven, evidence-based framework that transforms school culture. The results from Maine schools currently utilizing this model are clear and compelling:

**Drastic Reduction in Failure Rates:** Schools implementing BARR have seen an average 40% reduction in course failure rates after just one year. By identifying struggling students early and intervening before they fail, we are keeping Maine students on the path to graduation.

**Combatting Chronic Absenteeism:** BARR schools have reported a 33% decrease in chronic absenteeism. Because students feel more connected to their teachers and peers through the BARR and teacher-team structures, they are physically showing up for school at significantly higher rates.

**Improved School Climate:** Beyond the numbers, BARR creates a safer, more supportive environment. Data shows a 34% improvement in school climate, as reported by students and staff. A positive climate is the foundation upon which all other academic success is built.

### **The Necessity of Completion**

The BARR model requires a full three-year cycle of coaching and professional development to become self-sustaining. If we fail to fund these remaining cycles, we risk:

- **Stranding an Investment:** The State has already invested significant resources in these schools. Stopping now—before teams are fully trained to sustain the model independently—risks erosion of the progress already made.
- **Losing Real Momentum:** The 33% reduction in absenteeism and 40% reduction in failure rates represent real Maine children whose lives are being changed. We cannot afford to pull the rug out from under these 38 communities just as these interventions are taking hold.

- Inconsistency in Student Support: For students in these schools, BARR has provided a vital safety net where they are “seen” by a multidisciplinary team of teachers every single week.

During my tenure as Superintendent of RSU 25 (2008–2024), I had the opportunity to partner with the BARR Center to implement the BARR framework at Bucksport High School in 2010. Bucksport High School was the first school in Maine and only the third school in the nation to adopt BARR. At the time, the school faced significant challenges, including low graduation rates, elevated dropout rates, and poor attendance. After implementation, those indicators improved dramatically. The graduation rate rose from 78 percent to over 92 percent and has continued to perform at or above state and national averages. The dropout rate declined from more than 7 percent to under 2 percent. The difference was the BARR model.

What drove these results was not a new program layered on top of existing demands, but a thoughtful realignment of current resources and practices. BARR emphasizes intentional relationship-building with every student, structured weekly team discussions using real-time student data, and coordinated efforts to connect students and families with both school-based and community support. In short, it creates a system in which every student is known by adults who collaborate to ensure students are successful—academically, socially, and emotionally.

BARR is a proven K–12 school improvement framework built on two essential pillars: relationships and data. Its whole-school, strengths-based approach allows educators to identify concerns early, intervene effectively, and remove barriers that might otherwise prevent students from thriving. On average, schools implementing BARR reduce course failure rates by 35 percent within one year. They also report measurable gains in reading and math achievement, reductions in chronic absenteeism, and fewer disciplinary incidents. Equally important, educators consistently report improved morale, stronger professional collaboration, and greater job satisfaction.

The BARR framework’s impact is supported by rigorous national research. BARR is the first and only school improvement model to achieve all three tiers of evidence under the U.S. Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation validation framework, with twenty statistically significant positive outcomes documented for students and teachers. An excerpt from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) BARR i3 Scale-Up Evaluation executive summary (June 2022) states:

*“The findings of this scale-up evaluation are consistent with those we found in our 2019 i3 validation study of BARR and the ones that Corsello and Sharma found in their 2015 evaluation of BARR’s first i3 development grant. All three studies found substantial positive impacts on credit attainment and course failure and smaller effects on academic achievement and grades. In this evaluation, we also found a favorable effect on chronic absenteeism and substantial favorable effects on a range of teacher experiences and attitudes.*

*The findings from this evaluation, and two previous studies, continue to support the conclusion we made at the end of the validation study, which is that BARR is an effective model for schools aiming to improve students’ transitions into ninth grade, reduce course failure, and narrow gaps in student academic outcomes between different demographic groups of students, while improving teacher collaboration and views of colleagues, use of data, and views of school supports.”*

Today, the BARR framework serves schools in 26 states and the District of Columbia and is implemented in 124 schools in Maine and more than 470 schools nationwide, demonstrating both its scalability and effectiveness across diverse settings.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support this proposal and provide the resources necessary for identified schools already participating to complete the full three-year implementation cycle. This is a targeted request focused specifically on schools currently in Years 1 and 2 of training—not a broad expansion initiative. Your investment will strengthen our education system, support our educators, and most importantly, ensure that every student has the opportunity to succeed. It is not simply an expenditure; it is an investment in outcomes, in educators, and in the future of our students.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your continued commitment to Maine.

Respectfully submitted,

**James Boothby, M.Ed., C.A.S.**

Executive Director, Penobscot River Educational Service Center  
BARR Ambassador

## BARR is supporting 120 Maine schools.



### BARR Elementary

**97%**

grew in ELA and/or Math Proficiency

**100%**

reduced their chronic absenteeism rate

from 2022-23 to 2024-25



### BARR Secondary

**93%**

grew in ELA and/or Math Proficiency

**94%**

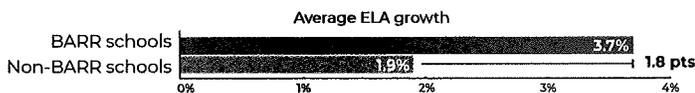
reduced their chronic absenteeism rate

from 2023-24 to 2024-25

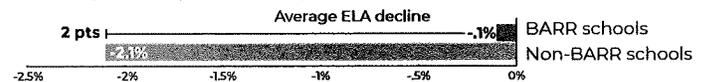
## BARR provides a proven accountability structure that leads to ELA, Math, and Chronic Absenteeism improvements.

### BARR increases ELA Scores in Maine schools

From 2022-23 to 2024-25, BARR elementary schools averaged ELA gains about **1.8 percentage points higher** than non-BARR schools.

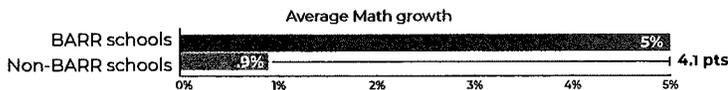


From 2023-24 to 2024-25, BARR secondary schools average ELA scores **remained stable** while non-BARR secondary schools declined an average of 2.0 percentage points more.

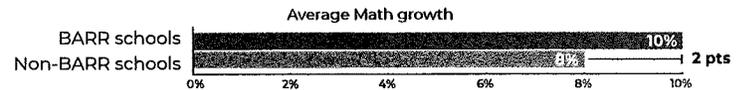


### BARR increases Math Scores in Maine schools

From 2022-23 to 2024-25, BARR elementary schools averaged Math gains about **4.1 percentage points higher** than non-BARR schools.

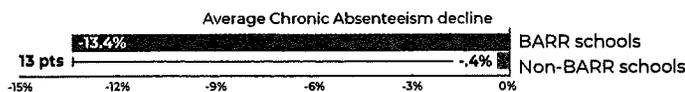


From 2023-24 to 2024-25, BARR secondary schools averaged Math gains about **2 percentage points higher** than non-BARR schools.

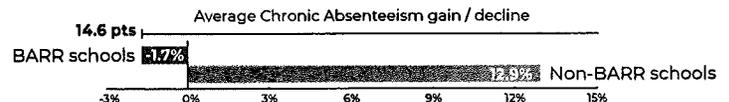


### BARR reduces Chronic Absenteeism in Maine schools

From 2022-23 to 2024-25, BARR elementary schools averaged Chronic Absenteeism declines about **13 percentage points better** than non-BARR schools.



From 2023-24 to 2024-25, BARR secondary schools averaged Chronic Absenteeism declines about **14.6 percentage points better** than non-BARR schools.



**BARR is an evidence-backed systemwide school improvement model for K-12 education.**

The Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR) model provides three years of coaching support, professional development, resources, and access to the national network of BARR educators.

Improves a school's effectiveness at building relationships

Leverages real-time student data

Capitalizes on the strengths of students and staff



# Maine BARR Schools

Since 2010, BARR has served:

**120** schools in **50** school districts,  
**67,712** students and **18,386** teachers.

"[Thanks to BARR], we have seen not just better test scores but increased student confidence, deeper understanding of scientific concepts, and stronger preparation for future academic success."

Indian Township School Principal Molly Newell  
in Washington County

## AOS 94

- Dexter Regional High School
- Ridge View Community School

## Biddeford Schools

- Biddeford High School
- Biddeford Intermediate School
- Biddeford Middle School

## Brunswick School Department

- Brunswick Junior High School
- Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary

## Calais School Department

- Calais Elementary School
- Calais Middle/High School

## Charter Schools

- Acadia Academy
- Arthur R. Gould School
- Maine Academy of Natural Sciences

## Cherryfield Public Schools

- Cherryfield Elementary

## Easton Public Schools

- Easton Elementary

## Ellsworth School Department

- Ellsworth Elementary Middle School
- Ellsworth High School

## Eustis Public Schools

- Stratton Elementary School

## Five Town Community School District

- Camden Hills Regional High School

## Gorham School District

- Great Falls Elementary
- Narragansett Elementary
- Village Elementary

## Indian Township School

- Indian Township School

## Islesboro Central School

- Islesboro Central School K-12

## Kittery School District

- Traip Academy

## Lisbon Public Schools

- Lisbon Community School
- Philip W Sugg Middle School

## Machiasport Public Schools

- Fort O'Brien Elementary School

## Madawaska School Department

- Madawaska Middle/High School

## Princeton Public Schools

- Princeton Elementary School

## RSU 02

- Monmouth Memorial School

## RSU 03

- Mount View High School

## RSU 04

- Oak Hill High School
- Oak Hill Middle School

## MSAD 06

- Bonny Eagle Middle School
- George E Jack School
- Edna Libby Elementary School
- H B Emery Jr Memorial School
- Steep Falls Elementary School
- Hollis School

## RSU 07

- North Haven Community School

## RSU 09

- Academy Hill School
- Cape Cod Hill Elementary School
- Cascade Brook Elementary School
- G.D. Cushing School
- Mt Blue High School
- Mt Blue Middle School
- WG Mallet Elementary

## RSU 10

- Buckfield Jr-Sr High School
- Hartford-Sumner Elementary
- Mountain Valley High School
- Mountain Valley Middle School

## MSAD 11

- Gardiner Regional Middle School

## RSU 13

- Oceanside High School
- Oceanside Middle School

## RSU 14

- Jordan-Small Middle School
- Windham High School
- Windham Primary School
- Windham Middle School

## RSU 16

- Bruce M Whittier Middle School
- Elm Street School
- Minot Consolidated School
- Poland Community School
- Poland Regional High School

## MSAD 17

- Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School
- Oxford Hills Middle School
- Paris Elementary School

## RSU 21

- Kennebunk High School

## RSU 22

- Hampden Academy

## RSU 23

- Loranger Memorial School
- Jameson Elementary School

## RSU 24

- Charles M. Sumner Learning Campus

## RSU 25

- Bucksport High School
- Bucksport Middle School
- Miles Lane Elementary School

## RSU 34

- JA Leonard Middle School
- Old Town Elementary School
- Old Town High School

## MSAD 35

- Marshwood High School
- Marshwood Middle School

## MSAD 37

- Narraguagus High School

## RSU 38

- Maranacook Community High School
- Maranacook Community Middle School
- Manchester Elementary School
- Readfield Elementary School

## RSU 39

- Caribou Community School
- Caribou High School

## MSAD 44

- Telstar Middle School

## MSAD 49

- Lawrence High School
- Lawrence Junior High School

## MSAD 52

- Leavitt Area High School
- Tripp Middle School

## RSU 54/MSAD 54 - Skowhegan

- Skowhegan Area High School

## MSAD 55 - Sacopee Valley

- Sacopee Valley High School
- Sacopee Valley Middle School

## RSU 56

- Dirigo High School
- TWK Dirigo Middle School

## RSU 58/MSAD 58

- Day Mountain Regional Middle School
- Kingfield Elementary School
- Mount Abram Regional High School
- Phillips Elementary School

## RSU 59

- Madison Elementary School
- Madison High School

## MSAD 60

- Noble High School
- Noble Middle School

## RSU 61

- Lake Region Middle School
- Lake Region High School

## RSU 64

- Central High School

## RSU 67

- Mattanawcook Academy
- Mattanawcook Jr High

## MSAD 70

- Mill Pond School

## MSAD 75

- Mt. Ararat Middle School

## RSU 78

- Rangeley Lakes Regional School

## RSU 79/MSAD 01

- Presque Isle High School

## RSU 83/MSAD 13

- Moscow Elementary
- Upper Kennebec Middle/High School

## Saco Public Schools

- Saco Middle School

## Sanford School Department

- Sanford High School

## Sedgwick Public Schools

- Sedgwick Elementary

## Westbrook School Department

- Canal Elementary School
- Congin Elementary School
- Saccarappa Elementary School
- Westbrook High School
- Westbrook Middle School