

**Testimony of Jennifer Goodwin, RSU 34  
In Support of LD 1527**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Jennifer Goodwin. I am a resident of Hampden and a School Community Coordinator at RSU 34 in Old Town.

Today, I'm submitting testimony in support of LD 1527 "An Act To Promote the Community School Program"

In 2019, I stood before the committee and gave my testimony on LD 1216, "An Act to Support Community Schools." As a community School Coordinator for RSU 34 in Old Town, I have the unique position of seeing and hearing our families need for support. According to 2023 Maine Kids Count Data Book, we are tied for first, for the highest child poverty rate, in New England with Rhode Island, with 34,000 children experiencing poverty. The rates of high school students who seriously considered suicide have increased from 16.4% to 18.5% in the state of Maine. One in four children lived in families where no parent had secure year-round full-time employment. Lack of access to affordable child care, reliable transportation, or living in rural communities with few high-paying jobs are all factors that make it difficult to maintain full-time employment. 816 children and youth were counted as homeless on January 25, 2022. Despite these challenges all children deserve learning environments that offer high quality curricula and provide learning experiences that extend beyond a standard learning day. Our public schools should not be expected to take sole, or even primary, responsibility for creating such environments for learning. However, the Community School model enables schools to form intentional partnerships with families and a wide range of different community organizations, volunteers, civic groups and others to create such environments. Partners provide services and opportunities that support the learning mission of the school and increase the effectiveness of the learning environment.

- 1. Community Schools are an effective and efficient strategy for improving education and supporting our kids, that helps ensure ALL students, no matter who they are or where they live, have the tools and opportunities they need to thrive.**
- 2. A Community School strategy is designed and well-suited to address urgent student, family, and community needs in times of crises, as we've seen during the global Coronavirus pandemic, and its lasting effects. It's a comprehensive recovery plan in times of severe and unprecedented need.**
- 3. Community Schools are hyper-local.**
- 4. Districts want to adopt this strategy.**
- 5. Children and young people have more than just academic needs. Community Schools support the whole child, while increasing student outcomes.**
- 6. Community Schools are committed to sustainability.**

How does RSU 34 support families that are facing all of the challenges I mentioned above. With intentional partnerships. I explained in 2019 how we partnered with Good Shepherd and local churches to combat food insecurity. We partner with Pathways, Penquis, Northernlight Acadia to provide services and support for mental health needs, and substance use education. We partner with University of Maine to provide enrichment opportunities, and outdoor learning experiences. We continue to support those partnerships and our students. We are always looking for ways to expand on those, with grants. We recently applied for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning grant to provide after school opportunities for our students, and we are working with PCHC for school based health clinic, as well as mental health clinics in our schools. We are participating in professional development to learn how to support our mental health needs in our schools through a partnership with Maine CDC and Maine DHHS.

What has the cost been? Little to nothing. These partnerships have helped flourish the programs that we are starting and they are almost running themselves. The cost is expanding a little with more after school programming, but we have been able to know that the need is greater than the cost. As we explore more options, a Homework Diner, more enrichment and family engagement opportunities. Those costs may expand a little more, but some of that cost will get absorbed by the organizations that we partner with, by creating contracts and memorandums of understanding.

The Community School model can flourish in Maine with your support and by encouraging others to join in support. Many schools already have great partnerships with community groups, but a Community School model will make intentional partnerships a priority for the benefit of the students, their families and the communities in which they live. Physical and mental health services, child and family services, adult programming, before/after school programming, violence prevention programming, youth development and many other such programs can be coordinated in a succinct way to help our communities and families prosper. Supporting Community Schools will foster the continuation and further growth of such partnerships year after year.

Jennifer Goodwin  
RSU 34