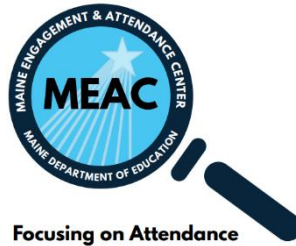


Maine Engagement and Attendance Center (MEAC) Office Hour #2 Follow-up Notes



- Session #2: Oct. 16 – Build routine, relationships, and relevance

Oct. 16, 2025, 3:30-4:30

Recording: To see the MEAC Office Hour Recording, please visit the MEAC webpage:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/meac>

Summary of Session:

The meeting focused on strategies to improve school attendance through family engagement and community involvement, with discussions centered on the framework of Building Assets, Reducing Risks (BARR), and its successful implementation in various schools across the state. Participants shared experiences and insights on building strong relationships between students, teachers, and families, emphasizing the importance of relevant learning experiences and consistent communication. The group explored funding challenges, technical issues, and evidence-based practices for improving student engagement, with follow-up resources to support ongoing implementation efforts.

Building routine, relationships, and relevance:

Sarah highlighted the **correlation between high family engagement and increased attendance, emphasizing the need for systemic changes and collaborative efforts**. Jim Boothby, a retired superintendent with diverse experience, shared insights from his district's efforts to improve graduation rates and address community concerns. The discussion included (MEAC)'s Tier 1 evidence-based practice focused on building routines, relationships, and relevance.

Sharing School Success Stories:

Jim shared the success of Bucksport High School's implementation of the *Building Assets, Reducing Risks* (BARR) program, which was one of the first three schools in the country to adopt it. Using this framework, the school saw significant improvements in graduation rates, peaking at 95% on a 4-year cohort, and a dropout rate that dropped below 2%. The program **focused on**

building strong relationships between students, teachers, and parents through regular team meetings, risk reviews, and dedicated time during the school day for discussions and data collection. Jim emphasized that while the BARR framework was particularly effective for their school, the principles of prioritizing student relationships and relevant learning could be applied in any educational setting, even where the BARR framework was not in place.

BARR Framework Benefits in Education:

Jim and Sarah discussed the benefits of the BARR framework in education, emphasizing its ability to **foster genuine relationships between students and teachers, improve student engagement, and enhance overall school performance.** They highlighted the framework's research-backed success and its potential to **create a sense of mattering and relevance among students, which aligns with recent findings on youth thriving.** Jim also shared insights on upscaling BARR practices, encouraging schools interested in adopting the framework to reach out to the BARR Center and connect with Page Nichols Page.Nichols@maine.gov for guidance.

Student Engagement and Dropout Prevention:

Strategies to engage students and reduce dropouts, emphasizing the importance of building relationships with students, families, and the community, were discussed. The team highlighted the significance of **making education relevant to students' lives and encouraging conversations about future career goals.** Jim shared successful practices from his experience, including **greeting students at the door and participating in school activities, which fostered a sense of belonging and personal connection among students.** Participants were encouraged to focus on available resources and implementation of one or two practices before reconvening on November 20th.

Morning Meetings for Student Engagement:

Sarah and Jim discussed the impact of establishing **morning meetings or advisory periods** as evidence-based practices to enhance student engagement and connection to instruction. They emphasized the need for **a systemic approach rather than isolated efforts,** citing the high impact of involving the entire school community, including families and community partners. Sarah shared an example of a student whose attendance issues went largely unnoticed, suggesting the need for a system to help students and families track attendance goals. Jim agreed on the **power of data and student involvement** in monitoring progress, while Sarah also mentioned the benefits of **project-based learning that incorporates student input.**

Project-Based Learning Success Stories:

Jim shared examples of **successful project-based learning initiatives** at his school, including a hydroponics greenhouse and outdoor pizza oven projects that engage students and improve

their learning experience. Sarah and Page discussed the **positive impact of the BARR** Center's work on **graduation rates and attendance**, with Jim noting that his school's graduation rate improved from 76% to 95% after implementing this framework. Page confirmed that **consistent positive trends in attendance, engagement, and academic performance have been observed** across schools using the BARR Center's approach, though she emphasized that it's not a complete solution.

BARR Framework Implementation Strategies:

Sarah and Jim discussed the **importance of leadership and collaboration** in implementing the BARR framework, emphasizing its ability to **provide real-time data** and improve educational outcomes. Julie highlighted the immediate **benefits of adopting even small changes**, such as greeting students at the door, and encouraged attendees to start implementing actionable strategies. **Jim offered to arrange visits to BARR schools for those interested in observing its implementation firsthand**, expressing hope that BARR could be adopted widely across Maine and beyond.

Wrap-up and reminder to join the next MEAC Office Hour, **November 19th**, focusing on **establishing early warning systems and team-based responses**.

Month	Strategy	Student Attendance Actions	Family Attendance Actions	Educator Attendance Actions	Administrator Attendance Actions	Community Partner Attendance Actions
October	Build routine, relationships, and relevance	Set attendance goals; engage in daily routines, build relationships	Set morning routines; reinforce importance of school	Start each day with student check-ins, link lessons to locally relevant issues	Share school-wide attendance data, align daily schedules to support routine and connection	Mentor or run student clubs, host workshops on building connections with school

This month, our TIER 1 Evidence-based practice focus:

OCTOBER – Routine + Relevance Build Engagement

Check: Are routines consistent and learning meaningful?

Research: Kern & Clemens, 2007; Edwards, 2003; Davidovitch & Dorot, 2023 . ([Kern & Clemens, 2007](#); [Edwards, 2003](#); [Davidovitch & Dorot, 2023](#))

- Daily routines and consistent bell schedules: Increase student security and trust.
- Morning meetings or advisory periods: Build connection and readiness for learning.

- Engaging, culturally relevant instruction: Students show up when learning is meaningful.
- Classroom observations to check for routines and engagement
- Ask students in focus groups how relevant and connected they feel to instruction
- Start classes with check-ins
- Use project-based learning and student input

Slide deck from MEAC Office Hours #2, Oct. 2025:

[Maine Engagement and Attendance Center. Office Hours. 2.0.pptx](#)

- **Practices to consider implementing in the next month:**

- **Greet students daily at the door, by name, in an engaged and unbusy manner:**
 - Develop your own 'Greeting at the Door' Routine and visual [Brain-based Benefits of Greeting Students at the Door](#)
- **Establish morning meetings** or advisory periods
 - Consistency throughout the school, with everyone agreeing to participate
 - Classroom Routines: <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/beh1/cresource/q2/p06/>
- Ask students in focus groups how **relevant and connected** they feel to instruction
 - Link lessons to locally relevant issues
 - [Relevant, Engaging Learning - Attendance Works](#)
- Create a system to **assist students** in **setting their own attendance goals**. Provide their personal attendance **data** to help guide this conversation.
- Use **project-based learning** with **student input**
 - [Research Briefs - Lucas Education Research](#)
- Foster TIER 1 practices through **community partnerships**
- Connect with BARR
 - www.barrcenter.org

- Sign up for the CMI (Count ME In!) Newsletter <http://eepurl.com/h6FSZT> (CMI e-news)
 - <https://countmeinmaine.org/about-count-me-in/>
- Register to attend the PBIS Annual Conference: [Conference — Maine PBIS](#),
 - Nov. 13th, Augusta Civic Center 8:30-4:00
 - If you have been identified for additional school support, you receive 3 free school-level registrations to the Maine PBIS conference
- Connect with Jim Boothby for support in **building routine, relationships, and relevance** OR to visit a BARR school
 - jaboot6280@gmail.com
- Connect with Aubrie Howard for school climate supports
 - Aubrie.Howard@maine.gov
- Connect with Signe Lynch for student / McKinney-Vento supports
 - Signe.Lynch@maine.gov
- Connect with Stacy Barlow to explore Creating a Culture of Care in Schools using Restorative Practices: [Creating a Culture of Care: Training Sequence](#)
 - Stacey.Barlow@maine.gov

Attend future MEAC Office Hours, the 3rd Thursday of each month, 3:30-4:30. [Register HERE for MEAC Office Hours](#)

Routine, relationships, and relevance reduce anxiety and increase attendance.

Shared practices of what is already working well to make this happen...

Educator feedback from the Ed Summit, Thomas College, August 2025

Student Attendance Actions:

- Students set their own attendance goals
- Engage in daily routines
- Build relationships
- Morning announcements w/ student voice

Family Attendance Actions:

- Set morning routines
- Reinforce importance of school

Educator Attendance Actions:

- Greeting students by name each day
- Start each day with a student check-in
- Link lessons to locally relevant issues
- Responsive classroom training and strategy implementation
- Visual schedules
- Create welcoming classrooms- consider design flow
- Try to be yourself at school where you are engaged for being you not just content
- Clearly visible schedule, expectations, and rules
- Develop morning routines with student input
- Positive journaling, meditation
- Go over daily goals and the daily agenda
- Begin and end day in homeroom
- Morning meetings
- Car and bus greeters
- Consistent expectations across grades

Administrator Attendance Actions:

- Greetings and goodbyes by names
- Offer and promote responsive classroom training
- Conduct a schoolwide culture and climate assessment
- Hold regularly scheduled assemblies
- Create schoolwide events
- Student of the month
- Teaching character
- Project wisdom
- Daily messages for staff and students
- Principal greets every student at the door each morning by name
- Share school wide attendance data
- Align daily schedules to support routines and connection
- Develop a common schedule building wide
- Schedule changes communicated to families, students, and staff ahead of time
- Daily announcements over intercom and emailed to students and parents
- Biweekly student/teacher check in
- 2-minute walk through specific strategies (for routines and relationship building)

Community Attendance Partner Actions:

- Mentor or run student clubs
- Host workshop on building connections with the school (for community businesses or families)

Successes shared by participants:

- ❖ Our staff meetings start with someone as a volunteer GREETER, being that positive first face as people enter the meeting space.
- ❖ Having more school community events...not just one open house. More parents and kids are coming, and they have found fewer attendance issues!
- ❖ We are in year 3 of BARR implementation, and also are a Community School and strive to incorporate our families at any chance we can.
- ❖ Here is a link to Maine's 2024/25 Annual Report which includes aggregated data from 94 BARR Schools in Maine: <https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/inline-files/BARR%20-%202023-2024%20Maine%20Annual%20Briefing%20-%2010.9.2025.pdf>
 - page.nichols@maine.gov



Remember... we each hold a vital role in increasing attendance.

What can YOU focus on today to support increased attendance in Maine Schools tomorrow?

The Maine Engagement and Attendance Team is part of the Maine DOE Office of School and Student Supports (O3S). For further questions, please contact Maine DOE O3S Specialist Sarah Nelson at Sarah.Nelson@maine.gov.