



Memo to the Commissioners

July 20, 2026

From: Liz Blackwell-Moore

Subject: Cumberland County Public Health Opioid Settlement Prevention Project Summary and Budget

Background and Context

We all want young people in our community to have the opportunity for health and thriving. Preventing substance use disorder is a key strategy for meeting that goal. Yet funding for prevention is extremely limited, making up about 1-2% of the total spent on addressing the problem. Additionally, not all efforts in the name of prevention have their intended outcome. The most impactful prevention efforts are grounded in the science of prevention and are community driven. They target the root causes of the problem, change the policies, systems, and environments that affect daily life, and/or improve the conditions that shape health. Most importantly, they are designed to make lasting change.

Cumberland County Public Health receives about \$300,000 a year in state funding specifically for substance use prevention through the Maine Prevention Network grant. The County also receives about \$200,000 a year in opioid settlement funds that up until now have been mostly used for coordination and interventions on the harm reduction, treatment and recovery side of the problem. CCPH staff have done incredible prevention work across the county by partnering with schools, recreation departments, community-based organizations, parent groups, healthcare providers, and many more, to implement evidenced based strategies. Yet prevention gaps remain. A primary prevention gap identified in *Cumberland County Public Health's 2023-2027 Assessment and Action Plan for the Opioid Settlement Fund* is "a scarcity of multi-tiered behavioral health and case management services for socially & emotionally vulnerable children and families, impacting whether and how children arrive at school."

Over the past two years, a few Cumberland County Public Health prevention staff have been planning and concept testing a pilot project focused on middle school aged children who have been impacted by opioids with the goal of increasing the presence of protective factors and decreasing their risks for behavioral health problems. Being chronically absent from school has been identified as a key risk factor. Students who miss more than 10% of school days, the definition of chronically absent, are less likely to read proficiently by third grade, more likely to fail in middle school and eventually, more likely to drop out of high school. In 2025, a quarter of all students in Maine were chronically absent from school. Children from economically disadvantaged households were two times more likely to be chronically absent than their non-economically disadvantaged peers (35% vs. 16%).

Responding to an urgent need to re-engage students and families in schools, CCPH proposes supporting school districts most impacted by opioid use to design a comprehensive program focused on building trusting relationships with families, breaking down barriers to attendance, and getting students back to school. This project would be funded by the County's opioid settlement funding.

Why Home Visits?

Supportive Home Visitation is a targeted (Tier II) student intervention that serves as part of a comprehensive system of support for families whose students are struggling with consistent attendance. Its mission is to build trusting relationships with families to ultimately positively impact students' engagement and attendance.



Students at-risk of or already chronically absent and disengaged from school are identified by the school. Home visits are scheduled opportunities for a pair of home visitors to go to the home of an identified student to meet with a parent or guardian for the purpose of strengthening the school-family relationship in a positive and relational manner. Supportive Home Visitation has been shown to significantly improve school attendance, increase trust between families and school staff, and improve educational outcomes for students.

Description of the Pilot Project

The purpose of the project is to support schools to identify and partner with families to improve student attendance and family engagement through supportive home visits.

Critical components of the pilot project include:

- Schools identify a team of 3 or more school staff to work with CCPH to co-design a plan to implement the supportive home visitation pilot.
- School and CCPH staff identify additional partners, i.e. community-based providers and organizations, to bolster basic needs and other resources that support attendance and family engagement.
- Use chronic absence data to prioritize who receives home visits.
- Create and/or build out systems to review attendance data and other social measures of well-being over time to allow for continuous improvement.
- Identify a team of home visitors. Home visitors may be any willing school staff member with a supportive mindset including administrators, teachers, student support staff, family liaisons, or community partners.
- Identify & train home visitors to implement supportive home visits according to the available research-based models.
- Support collaborative spaces for home visitors to debrief their visits with families.
- Identify a mechanism for evaluation and data collection for families participating in the home visiting pilot.

Criteria for schools: Preference will be given to communities who have been disproportionately impacted by opioids and substance use disorder. Other factors for inclusion include schools with higher rates of chronic absenteeism, schools that utilize an Multi Tiered System of Support framework for assessing student well-being, and communities with higher rates of families for economically disadvantaged households.

Proposed Budget:

School Funding needs:

Partner Schools would be eligible for a grant to pay for these kinds of expenses:

- Staff time for project design and ongoing project management
- Stipends for Home Visitors (teachers and staff doing visits outside of their contracted work hours)
- Materials that support families with attendance (e.g. alarm clocks)

Max award per school: \$15,000

Total allocation for schools for FY2027: \$30,000

CCPH Funding needs:

Additional Settlement funds are needed to support coordination and implementation of the Supportive Home Visitation pilot project. These funds will support CCPH staff time to execute the following components of the project:

- Facilitate school-based implementation teams
- Support development of data systems for measuring impact



- Provide guidance on best-practice models for home visits
- Support district staff in developing implementation plans
- Support training for home visitors
- Support post-visit debriefs/community of practices
- Manage evaluation and reporting

Total allocation for project coordination:
24 staff hours for 52 weeks = \$75,000

Project Budget for FY 2027:

Schools: \$30,000

CCPH staff time: \$75,000

Total: \$105,000

Funds would come from the County's opioid settlement funds. Here is a summary of Cumberland County's opioid settlement fund and the proposed project spending for year 1 of the project.

Project funding for subsequent 2 years: After the pilot year, CCPH would need approximately \$80,000 each year for two more years to continue the project with two school districts in order to work through barriers, measure outcomes, and ensure adoption of the model. Total Funds for the project over 3 years would be about \$265,000.