



MMSA

## CASE STUDY

# Blue Hill Consolidated School

Partnership With

# Maine TREE & Woodlawn Museum

## Professional Development Overview

Five schools on the Blue Hill Peninsula in School Union 93 came together to partner with Maine TREE and the Woodlawn Museum for a four-day teacher professional learning week in Summer 2024. The professional learning week was designed by a team that involved a representative from each of the five participating K-8 schools to promote and support teacher buy-in. Blue Hill Consolidated School had the most representation, making up over half of the teacher participants across the five schools. The week involved visits to several local community institutions that support climate and environmental education as well as planning time for teachers. Community partners included:

- **Woodlawn Museum**, which consists of The Black House, a registered national historic landmark, and an extensive trail system.
- **Shaw Institute**, a research institute studying the impact of contaminants on the health of humans, wildlife and the ecosystems we all share.
- **Blue Hill Heritage Trust**, a land trust with over 30 miles of public access trails.
- **Wilson Museum**, which features exhibits about cultures and natural history from across North America and around the world on its four-acre campus.
- **Maine Maritime Academy**, a public college with a student population of approximately 950, with courses of study in engineering, management, science, and transportation.
- **Bailey Bowden**, a local alewife restoration expert who is developing lesson plans to connect alewives to classroom climate education.

Teachers also received materials to support climate education projects in their classrooms, including moveable outdoor whiteboards and Forest Ecology Research Network (FERN) kits from Maine TREE Foundation.



**Location**  
Hancock County,  
Maine

### Contact

**MAINE TREE FOUNDATION**

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### Contact

**WOODLAWN MUSEUM**

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## IN COLLABORATION WITH



# Climate Education Philosophy

“We’re on the coast, we are already being impacted by climate change. The kids need to understand their impact on their environment and the future of their community. The sooner that we can educate people about that, we are going to be able to make a better impact. If they want to continue to live in their town or on the coast, they really need to understand our behavior, and it is our responsibility to make sure that this place is okay in 100 years and it exists. The kids need to have relationships with these other people outside the community and learn to work with adults and respect other groups. It’s just exposing them to everything we can, and then we can say that we’ve done our due diligence, educating the children to understand our impact on everything around us and how to navigate that.”

**DAWN MCLAUGHLIN**

Asst. Superintendent & Curriculum Coordinator

## Enabling Conditions



Strong network of local, community-based organizations to support climate education.



Teacher leadership and enthusiasm for outdoor learning.



Supportive school administration with existing relationships with community organizations.



Local Climate Committees and solutions-focused environmental initiatives (i.e. banning plastic bags and Styrofoam use).



## Implementation in the Classroom

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Charlie Daniels and Cori Carter, the fourth grade teaching team at Blue Hill Consolidated School, both participated in the teacher professional learning week and were eager to bring ideas back to their students. Both teachers have a passion for environmental stewardship and the outdoors, and outdoor learning was a core part of their curriculum prior to this program. However, this professional development opportunity provided more ideas, resources, and connections to new community organizations to enhance what they were already doing.

### *Mindfulness in Nature*

For Charlie, providing a platform for students to connect with nature through mindfulness practices is an important part of building a foundation for climate education. As he explains, “I think if students can develop a sense of place, they’re going to be more in tune with learning about what climate change is doing, because they’re aware of their natural environments. We’re kind of planting the seeds about being in touch with the outdoors, of where we live, which from there you can further scaffold up to more complex climate concepts.”

Charlie and Cori conduct monthly nature hikes with their students either on trails within walking distance of the school or other local landmarks that require transportation, like Caterpillar Hill Mountain. These hikes aren’t just field trips, explains Cori, “They were more like field work, where we focused on mindfulness and connecting what’s happening in the world around us to our science lessons and to our social studies lessons, and that’s where the climate change piece comes in- where the social studies and the science come together to show change over time in a way that’s not arguable, it’s evidence-based.” At the Caterpillar Hill hike, the teachers connected studies of historical human connections to the land, including the blueberry harvests by Indigenous communities, to current issues of trail erosion from foot traffic and flooding and the science behind these topics. Students keep nature journals detailing their observations on these hikes.

Charlie and Cori are observing positive changes in their students as a result of their emphasis on connecting to the outdoors and mindfulness. Cori recalled one example of how students’ perspectives have shifted, “When we’re out and we’re doing our hikes now, they are observing things that they totally would have missed before. We had some time at the end of the day, and we hiked down to the stream on the school campus, and on the way, one of the kids knew what wintergreen was, so then all of the kids were stopping and looking closely at the plants and smelling them and observing them and being really mindful and in the moment.”

### *Outdoor Learning Committee*

Charlie and Cori’s efforts have sparked growing interest in outdoor learning among other teachers at Blue Hill Consolidated School. Noticing this curiosity and enthusiasm, Cori and Charlie utilized some of the planning time at the summer workshop to develop an Outdoor Learning Committee to support other staff to integrate outdoor learning into their classes. The committee hosts internal professional development with other Blue Hill teachers to spread the resources and lessons they’ve developed and provide encouragement for other teachers. As Cori explains, “If we’re going to make this last, all these things that we’ve bought, and have them be useful (even if one of us should transfer schools), we’ve got to have something to give to the other teachers so that they feel confident going out and doing these things in their classrooms.”

## What Was Learned

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For Lena Ives, Education Director at the Maine TREE Foundation and lead organizer of the professional development, the initiative marked the organization's first sustained partnership with schools. Lena explains, "I have fallen in love with being able to follow up and not just have it be a one-off workshop, and then the struggle of trying to further the relationships with teachers after they get back into the classroom and the overwhelming day-to-day stuff hits them. For the schools, I think it's been helpful to work with somebody in the curriculum coaching role. I think at least we've been able to help make it a little bit of a lighter lift in something that's sustainable over time."

The relationships built throughout professional development have also helped to alleviate some feelings of anxiety or hopelessness about climate challenges.

The teachers participating in these projects have learned how to make projects successful and bring climate conversations into the classroom in a measured way. While the Blue Hill community has been overall supportive of these projects, there are occasionally students and families who do not believe that climate change is an issue. Cori has found the best strategy to engage those students is to focus on the facts, don't engage in arguments, and let students come to their own understanding. She has found that educating herself on the issues and developing engaging activities and games so students learn the science behind climate change to be most effective.

“ I don't feel as much like climate anxiety, because my inbox and my LinkedIn are flooded with people who are trying really hard in whatever way, in fisheries or wildlife or forestry, and they are doing what they can. This professional development is kind of that experience, seeing all the people that really care about this so it's less isolating and more locally relevant.”

A circular portrait of Lena Ives, a woman with dark hair, smiling, set against a background of a green, rocky mountain landscape under a blue sky. The portrait is framed by a yellow circular border.

LENA  
IVES

“ So then we talk about how carbon gets released into the air, and that it's not really supposed to do that, it really helps them to understand. They understand what is happening. They know the science behind it. Instead of just the blanket statement that adults have given them. They're very smart young people, they just need to be taught like everybody else. I think that's a good way to overcome a lot with children, is to give them the respect of knowledge.”

A circular portrait of Cori Carter, a woman with glasses and a red top, smiling. The portrait is framed by a yellow circular border.

CORI  
CARTER

# What's Next

Blue Hill Consolidated School is committed to maintaining the culture of outdoor learning and support for climate education that is a passion of the current staff. Dawn McLaughlin acknowledges that part of this responsibility comes from administration prioritizing this work in the curriculum as well as new staff.

"Having a climate change curriculum with our other science curriculum is priceless. My expectation is, in my position, that work continues and making sure that happens is my responsibility and the building principals' responsibility to make sure that stays and everybody has access and is allowed to do what they want to do around climate change education."

**DAWN MCLAUGHLIN**

## Information

The Climate Education Professional Development Pilot Grant Program, created by L.D. 1902, awards grants for high-quality climate-related interdisciplinary professional learning designed and carried out in partnership with community-based nonprofit organizations. The 3-year program prioritizes communities that have been historically underserved by climate education. From the Fall of 2023 through the Spring of 2026, this grant has awarded over \$1.5 million to 30 programs involving more than 50 schools, 400 educators, 50 community organizations, and thousands of students across Maine.

This case study was prepared by the Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance in partnership with the Maine Department of Education, Maine Environmental Education Association, and Nature Based Education Consortium.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Forest Ecology Research Network \(FERN\)](#)

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