

Pilot Name: Innovating the Curriculum: Weaving School-Based Outdoor and Experiential Learning into the Portland Public Schools PK-12 Experience

School/District Name: Portland Public Schools

Contact: Katie West

Overview:

Our innovation seeks to extend and deepen Outdoor and Experiential Learning within the district through curriculum integration, environmental literacy practices, and teacher capacity building. Given that many PPS students do not have equitable access to green spaces, school-based, meaningful outdoor experiences can help diminish health inequities, increase SEL benefits, and create new opportunities for learning in the natural environment.

A cohort of PreK-8 teachers will spend a year designing and implementing units of study which integrate outdoor and experiential components into our standards-aligned curriculum. An example is the place-based third-grade Wabanaki Studies/Life Science unit studying the Presumpscot River Watershed.

This innovation will transition the traditional three-week summer credit recovery program into a week-long intensive course integrating outdoor and experiential learning at the high school level. An example might be investigating the geology of Maine from the mountains to the coast while in the field.

Environmental Literacy Practices are building blocks and activities to create sustained and meaningful relationships with the natural world. They aim to help students and teachers understand the interconnectedness of all systems of life through ecological, economic, and cultural contexts. Specific practices include observation spots, field journaling, nature walks, weather recording, among others.

Launching this innovation, we recognize the need for building teacher capacity. Resources and professional development sessions will allow teachers to grow in their skill, comfort, and creativity working with and in the outdoors.

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