RREV School Snapshot – MSAD 11 Gardiner High School

Background

In June 2020, the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) was awarded a $16.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K–12 Education Models program to implement the Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures (RREV) program. The overarching purpose of RREV is to support Maine educators to create, implement, and disseminate responsive and innovative educational models that help all students learn and thrive.

Pilot Description

In August 2022, MSAD 11 Gardiner High School received an award from RREV to implement its *Earth Science Outdoor Classroom* project. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education Accelerated category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Reverse the school trend of declined academic outcomes, increased disengagement, and social/emotional issues among students.
- Change the instructional method of their first-year earth science class and spend 75% of its allocated instructional period outdoors.
- Provide equal opportunities to students of low socio-economic status to access quality equipment for outdoor activities.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Adapting lesson plans to outdoors, different seasons, and weather with the help of hired experts.
- Acquisition of outdoor wear and equipment, such as boots, rainwear, hats, mittens, winter jackets, snowshoes, fly fishing equipment, binoculars, sporting scopes, game cameras, shovels, backpacks.
- Acquisition of one wheelchair adapted for all-terrain use.
- Acquisition of educational material.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Budget

Category	**Year 1**
Personal Services – Salaries and Stipend (for curriculum development)	$10,000
Professional Services	$5,000
Instructional Supplies	$5,000
Outdoor gear	$57,000
Outdoor wear	$15,000
Property	$8,000
Total	**$100,000**

- Students: Around 84 Grade 9 students in Fall and 102 Grade 9 students in Spring (186 total) served.

- Educators: One teacher is directly involved in the planning and implementation phases (1 additional teacher will help to collect data about student satisfaction at the end of the project).

Responsiveness of the pilot

MSAD 11 Gardiner High School's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **It targets economically and physically disadvantaged students.** Staff realized that one of the barriers to having an effective academic experience was the lack of appropriate clothing and footwear among students and the lack of the right equipment for students with mobility challenges. The project will help the school to provide equal access to quality educational experiences to all their students regardless of their socio-economic status. The educator noted that some students needed clothing items such as jackets, raincoats, rain pants, and boots. The school also has students with mobility problems. The award helped to secure equipment necessary for outdoor education regardless of a student's physical abilities: "I bought an all-terrain wheelchair," noted the educator. The educator took this project as a personal legacy: "I really felt that I needed to create something before I left that could engage kids and get them back into wanting to learn and, really, truly being a member of our school."
- **It targets the socio- emotional needs of students**. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the school surveyed students and found high levels of anxiety. The school tried to use outdoor instruction to improve their engagement and the social emotional wellbeing. The school reported that "students, many who had struggled with traditional forms of instruction and assessment, showed improved behavior and greater interest in the lesson. Students began asking to go outside explaining they felt less stress, more creative, and able to complete more work." The RREV project is a commitment to include outdoor instruction and experiential learning as a beneficial novel approach to the school's teaching practices.

Innovativeness of the pilot

MSAD 11 Gardiner High School's pilot is innovative because:

- **It centers outdoor education in one of the subject core classes.** The pilot has the goal of transforming outdoor education as a school wide practice from the traditional sporadic and co curricular approach. For that, the participating educator plans to spend 75% of the instructional time outdoors during Earth Sciences class. This class is a requirement for all first-year students. Thus, it eventually provides all students with a new teaching/learning approach that the educator hopes to expand to other classrooms, subjects, and teachers. Initially, only first-year students will benefit from this approach, but the goal is for the pilot to serve as a model for other courses and grades. The training received and the lessons learned will help other teachers to adapt their curriculums to a more outdoor experience.
- **It provides a novel leadership opportunity for students**. The project plans to include mentorship and advising opportunities for participants as they progress as upperclassmen. The project envisions the collaboration of former students to deliver lessons and assist with organizational functions in the following years: "I'm hoping that that we can make it sort of full circle so that if you really did like it that much, you could come back and be a leader in that class as an upperclassman," noted the participating educator.

Sustainability of the pilot

MSAD 11 Gardiner High School's pilot model's strategy for sustainability includes:

- **Transferability to other sciences courses**. The project aims to become not only the expected curriculum for the Earth Sciences, but to serve as a model for other courses, such as biology: "Our biology class is adopting some lessons so that they, too, can go outside."
- **Shared used with families and the community**. The school envisions making the outdoor wear and gear available to students and their families when the school is not in session, through an organized loan system. Likewise, the project wants to involve the community in the maintenance of the outdoor spaces and extend the use of the planned observation centers and trails for exercise and relaxation: "It's also hopefully to provide or to help provide some outdoor sort of recreational places for their families as well."

SPRING UPDATE

Implementation Progress Update

Year 1 Challenges

- The school could not have all the equipment ready at the beginning of the academic year. The participating educator explained: "It took a while to get the accounting system down before we could order all the equipment. School had already started, and it was almost three weeks into the school year," which required last-minute changes to the already revised curriculum.
- "One man project." Since this is a project planned and implemented by one teacher: "I am the team," the educator needs to juggle between academic functions (teaching) and organizational/monitoring functions (safety issues, coordination, chaperoning, etc.) when outdoors.
- The weather is an issue. While the original intent was to do the identical curriculum - only in reverse order - it has proven to be impossible. Early winter (first semester) had very little snow and late winter (second semester) had a tremendous amount. The educator is continuously revising to teach the same concepts under different outdoor conditions.

Year 1 Successes