

RREV School Snapshot – MSAD 17

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 2021, MSAD 17 received an award from RREV to implement its *Teaching Outside: The Box*. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Expand outdoor learning opportunities for students at Agnes Gray Elementary and within the district by
 - Encouraging and training teachers to share ideas and best practices with their colleagues within the district.
 - Creating a resource bank of curriculum designed to use outdoor spaces for teachers within the district.
 - Creating new outdoor learning spaces at Agnes Gray Elementary School.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- In year one:
 - Create the role of an Outdoor Learning Coordinator based at Agnes Gray.
 - Expand existing outdoor learning spaces and build new outdoor learning spaces at Agnes Gray.
 - Develop a curriculum-aligned outdoor learning lesson and activity bank.
- In year two:
 - Expand the role of Outdoor Learning Coordinator to a district level that helps implement the pilot at other schools in the district in 1-4 week-long cycles.
 - Expand the curriculum-aligned outdoor learning lesson and activity bank and ensure availability for teachers across the district.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Category	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Personal Services – Salaries	\$61,138	\$63,328	\$124,466
Employee Benefits	\$41,320.71	\$43,173.88	\$84,494.59
General Supplies	\$1,500	\$1,500	\$3,000
Property	\$38,000	—	\$38,000
Total	\$141,958.71	\$108,001.88	\$249,96.59

- # of students served 413
- Grade levels served : PreK-6th

- Teachers directly involved: 27

Responsiveness of the pilot

MSAD 17's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **Developing physical infrastructure at Agnes Gray to provide ample space for outdoor education.** The pilot expanded preexisting outdoor spaces, including an orchard and a cabin, while also funding the creating of new outdoor learning spaces, including a yurt and a nature trail. Having more outdoor spaces available to teachers allowed multiple classes to take advantage of outdoor learning at the same time. This also allowed the Outdoor Learning Coordinator to better understand what types of planning and materials are necessary for teachers to function in different kinds of outdoor spaces.
- **Community assets and programs are integrated into the pilot.** The local community has an abundance of natural assets, including rivers and woods, which the school has been using for many years in outdoor teaching. In fact, the school already has three pavilions and a cabin used as outdoor learning spaces, and regularly implements educational programming, such as Forest Fridays,¹ in which students participate in one-off outdoor lessons. According to the implementation team, these programs are popular with students and teachers, but can be a “logistical nightmare” and are not necessarily integrated into the broader curriculum. The pilot builds on these assets by incorporating them into a more cohesive program with a dedicated staff person who is responsible for coordinating activities and ensuring lessons are meaningfully integrated with content standards.

Innovativeness of the pilot

MSAD 17's pilot is innovative because:

- **The development of the role of Outdoor Learning Coordinator across two years builds the capacity of teachers in the district to facilitate lessons in outdoor spaces more frequently.** The Outdoor Learning Coordinator acts as an expert, working both individually and with teams of teachers, to provide the necessary professional development and curriculum development for lessons to occur outside. By developing this role in the first year of the pilot before expanding the pilot to other schools in the district allowed the Outdoor Learning Coordinator to figure out the necessary structures and guidance to help classroom teachers develop these skills before working across multiple campuses in shorter cycles.
- **The development of an outdoor lesson bank across the district reduces the planning burden on teachers wanting to get outside.** By focusing on developing a bank of shared curriculum-aligned lessons and resources, the pilot provides the tools necessary for teachers with limited planning time to focus on bringing student outdoors rather than designing new lessons. Teachers are able to store developed lessons in a central place accessible to all teachers across the district and utilize the lessons that have already worked in other outdoor spaces. As the pilot is implemented the lesson bank grows, giving teachers more and more resources to teach kids outside.

¹ See the *Sun Journal* article [Teaching ‘outside the box’ \(in West Paris\)](#).

Sustainability of the pilot

One of the key measures MSAD 17's pilot model took for sustainability was moving the position of the Outdoor Learning Coordinator to a district level position during the second year of implementation. In doing so, both the cost and benefits of having this role are spread across the district as a whole and sources of future funding can be more flexible. Though it is still unclear if this will become a permanent district-wide position, the pilot team has been actively working to persuade the school board since the first year of implementation. Further, the pilot design also ensures that the lesson resources and the physical infrastructure investment will be maintained regardless of the permanency of the Outdoor Learning Coordinator Position.