

Camden-Rockport Elementary Innovates Through Outdoor Education

Key findings from ICF's external evaluation of RREV.



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 promote innovation in Maine schools so that all students across the state have access to high-quality and responsive learning opportunities. In August 2021, Camden-Rockport Elementary School received an RREV award to develop and implement *Out and About: The Outrageous Outdoors!*, which began in the 2021-22 school year. MDOE engaged an outside research firm, ICF, to conduct an evaluation of the RREV program, including implementation of this learning model at Camden-Rockport.

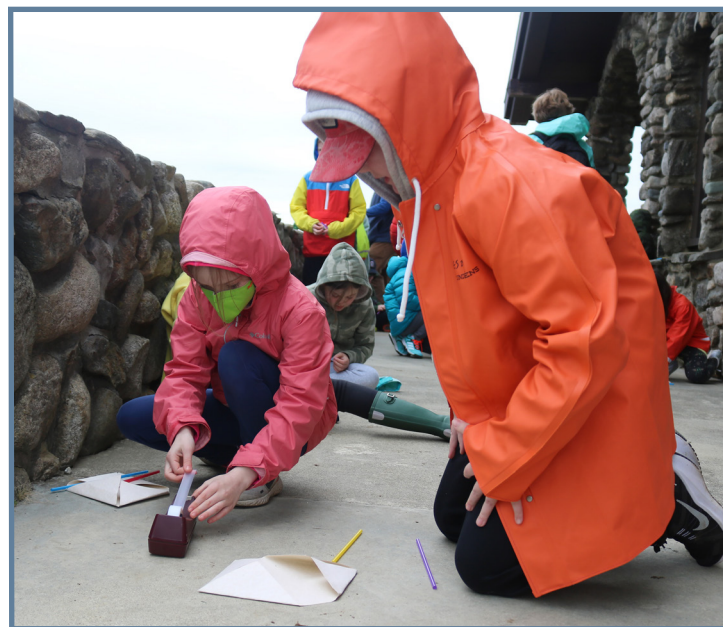


Image: Third-grade Camden-Rockport students learn about forces and motion through a kite-building activity at Tanglewood (a community partner).

What Makes this Learning Model Innovative?

- Channels curiosity and energy into productive activities
- Focus is on learning rather than success or failure
- Promotes environmental stewardship
- Supports long-term educator development

About Camden-Rockport's Innovative Learning Model

Out and About: The Outrageous Outdoors! focuses on increasing outdoor learning experiences for students from prekindergarten (pre-K) through fourth grade. This has been accomplished using many different strategies:

- Teachers incorporate outdoor time into their lesson planning utilizing on-site outdoor learning spaces
- Project-specific learning kits provide teachers with the necessary tools and materials to prepare students for outdoor learning
- Local partnerships with Aldermere Farms and Tanglewood support teachers in aligning outdoor learning experiences to curriculum standards
- Local and regional experts support teachers in co-planning and co-facilitating project-based learning for students
- Two teachers at Camden-Rockport serve as "outdoor liaisons" to connect teachers with local and regional experts to design responsive and meaningful residencies

Promising Findings

ICF's evaluation of RREV revealed several exciting insights about *Out and About*. These include:

- **Students have been active, joyful, and engaged learners.** Interviews with teachers and school administrators showed that student attendance was up this school year, particularly on planned outdoor days. Families also reported positive experiences, such as one parent who told an ICF evaluator that her daughter has been “really motivated and excited” about school since the program began.
- **Teachers and families credit the program with improving students' behavior and socio-emotional well-being.** While numerous factors contribute to overall mental and emotional wellness, some teachers observed that some students' behaviors showed improvement over the course of the school year, which they attributed to greater opportunities to be outside. Families shared similar observations that their children seemed to be recovering from the impacts of social isolation brought on by the pandemic through having outdoor learning experiences. For example, one parent said that the program **“has been good for [students'] overall mental health . . . it's so wonderful to see.”**
- **Students have demonstrated academic growth during the 2021–22 school year.**
By spring 2022, more than 87 percent of the Camden-Rockport student body demonstrated academic growth during their participation in the pilot.
- **Students and families reported positive experiences.**
Ninety-two percent of students agreed that they were glad they participated in the program, and 92 percent agreed that they liked their experience overall; 98 percent of families said that they would recommend this program to other families.

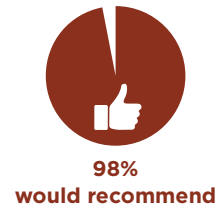


Image: Third-graders learn about forces and motions while flying kites at Tanglewood.

Future Plans

Camden-Rockport is excited to be entering its second year of implementing this innovative learning model! Here are some things that Camden-Rockport has planned to ensure the long-term success of *Out and About: The Outrageous Outdoors!*

- **Increased family engagement.** Camden-Rockport welcomes parent volunteers to help with our outdoor learning activities and field trips!