

RREV School Snapshot – RSU 20 Searsport

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 May 2022, Searsport District Middle High School received an award from RREV to implement its Viking Longhouse pilot. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education category. The goals of this pilot are to:

- Create a culture of connection and inclusion for all students and staff.
- Provide relevant and meaningful educational experiences by developing authentic and engaging curriculum and instruction that incorporates experiential education and utilizes the new longhouse outdoor educational facility.
- Enhance community connections for regular involvement in educational interactions through volunteer opportunities, service learning projects and internships.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- **The construction of the longhouse building to serve as an outdoor classroom.** The space will also be used for various service-learning projects and promote opportunities for engagement in class content outside of the normal classroom environment.
- **Training teachers and staff in experiential learning.** The pilot supports a new position, the Experiential Learning and Community Outreach (ELCO) Coordinator, who will act as an in-house facilitator, working with staff to integrate experiential education into their curriculum. Teachers will also participate in professional development to further deepen their understanding of experiential education, service learning and project based learning.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Category	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Personal Services – Salaries	\$56,101.50	\$0	\$56,101.50
Employee Benefits	\$11,898.50	\$0	\$11,898.50
Purchased Professional and Technical Services	\$17,000	\$0	\$17,000
General Supplies	\$30,000	\$0	\$30,000
Property	\$120,000	\$0	\$120,000
Miscellaneous and Debt Services	\$15,000	\$0	\$15,000
Total	\$250,000	\$0	\$250,000

- Student body of 250 students grades 6-12.
- The ELCO Coordinator will be available to assist all teachers in experiential education curriculum development and implementation and arrange logistics for experiential units.

Responsiveness of the pilot

Searsport District Middle High School's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **The focus on outdoor learning connects well with community organizations that are experienced in this form of education.** The pilot provides new and ongoing opportunities for school staff to leverage the knowledge and expertise of community organizations, such as Coastal Mountains Land Trust and Kieve Wavus Education.
- **Outdoor learning addresses mental health challenges local educators observed among students emerging from the pandemic.** The pilot team described a need for a safe space and supportive model for students struggling with mental health issues, which they observed were more common since the pandemic. In particular, the pilot team expressed a need for additional engagement opportunities for students who may be struggling in traditional classroom settings.

Innovativeness of the pilot

Searsport District Middle High School's pilot is innovative because:

- **It invites teachers to share their knowledge and lived experience in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of outdoor learning units.** The pilot team described a bottom-up, participatory approach for engaging teachers in ways that integrate their expertise and build more authentic buy-in across the school community. In contrast to programs where teachers receive professional development to implement an externally developed model or intervention, Searsport teachers were engaged in planning and developing outdoor-related units from the beginning. The pilot team expects this approach will also assist in building buy-in across the campus for when the models are increasingly implemented across subject areas.
- **The project will seek to integrate community participation and support into their educational practice.** The pilot includes community participation in the design and implementation of the new longhouse facility, allowing them to learn about and support the school's new initiatives. Additionally, students will engage in service-learning activities to further connect them to their community and provide additional engagement opportunities.

Sustainability of the pilot

Searsport District Middle High School's pilot model's strategy for sustainability includes a focus on integrating new teaching practices and enhancing community involvement through the temporary coordinator position created by award funds. This position would only last a year, but would be focused on implementing practices and making connections that would not require a specific coordinator after award funding ends. All other purchases are generally one-time expenses and maintenance will be covered by normal district funds.