

## RREV School Snapshot – RSU 35 MGWS

### 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 September 2022, Marshwood Great Works School (MGWS) received an Accelerator award from RREV to implement its Great Works Ventures Outdoors. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Increase student engagement and attendance by reducing the number of days students are absent.
- Increase social-emotional development by reducing the number of students who indicate that they felt only somewhat, a little, or not understood by a person at their school.
- Increase teachers' outdoor teaching skills through professional development and community partnerships to ensure outdoor teaching regularly occurs.
- Increase students' eco-literacy, defined as the understanding of connections in natural systems and the development of empathy for all life, through an expansion of the current curriculum

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Expanding the curriculum and outdoor learning opportunities offered through the 'Woodland and Wonder' special, one of the rotating special classes offered to all students on Thursdays. This class focuses on expanding students' observation skills and understanding of ecology while engaging students in outdoor lessons and hiking activities.
- Teachers can opt into additional curriculum design support from a curriculum coach focused on outdoor education as well as additional funds to support outdoor activities such as trips or hikes.
- Engaging a Nature Connection Coach who offers additional curriculum support and professional development to teachers who opt-in.
- Providing more outdoor learning opportunities for students to participate in MGWS-run afterschool programs. The pilot has a particular focus on students who teachers have recommended to receive additional support.
- All 4th-grade students participate in outdoor learning opportunities facilitated by the Browne Center of the University of New Hampshire for outdoor team-building activities and SEL development.

### Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Category	Year 1
Personal Services	\$4,046
Employee Benefits	\$953

Purchased Professional & Technical Services	\$24,000
General Supplies	\$12,800
Property	\$43,200
Miscellaneous and Debt Service	\$15,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

- 290 students served
- Grade levels served 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade
- All teachers directly involved

#### Responsiveness of the pilot

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

- **The pilot provides individually tailored opportunities for students in need of social-emotional support. The pilot focuses on identifying gaps in social emotional learning (SEL) and providing additional support to students in need.** Using the data sources the school already has (e.g. attendance, guidance referrals, friendship/lunch group requests, etc.) along with teacher and counselor recommendations, the pilot team has identified and specifically invited students who need additional SEL support to after-school activities. Further, the pilot will utilize an SEL survey developed for the initiative by Panorama Education. This tool will collect data on student social-emotional learning. In addition, the school counselor will conduct individual check-ins with students to gauge emotional well-being and connectedness to school. In doing so, the pilot will be responsive to the ongoing SEL needs of students as the year progresses.

#### Innovativeness of the pilot

MGWS's pilot is innovative because:

- **All students in the school will participate in a common class focused on eco-literacy.** At MGWS every student participates in a special class called 'Woodland and Wonder' for three class periods each semester. This class is designed to support the development of ecoliteracy skills while engaged in outdoor nature-based instruction. Using this time, the pilot team has ensured a degree of equity regarding outdoor learning opportunities across classrooms. The focus on the eco-literacy curriculum, the ability to understand the organization of natural systems and the processes that maintain the healthy functioning of living systems and sustain life on Earth, connects student learning directly to the outdoor spaces they are exploring as a part of this special.
- **All students in the school will participate as active citizen scientists on a project impacting Maine's ecology.** At MGWS every student participates in a collaboration project with the Gulf of Maine Research Institute. Students learn observation and measurement skills necessary to identify and collect data regarding the spread of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid in our local preserves. These data points are uploaded to lead researchers at the institute. The focus of this work is to provide every student the opportunity to engage in active science and practice applying skills to a local ecological problem.

- **Teachers opt-in to professional development as a way to promote buy-in and recognize the competing priorities of teachers.** The pilot team selected an opt-in opportunity for professional development to ensure that teaching staff would not feel overburdened by the requirement to participate in pilot professional development. Further, all teaching staff, regardless of participation in professional development, have access to the outdoor learning spaces around the school. Teachers can opt-in to professional development at any time during the school year.
- **Students have opportunities both during the school day and after school to be involved in the pilot.** In addition to ensuring all students have the opportunity to participate in the school-wide special class, pilot funds have been used to support access to after-school activities. The pilot team has targeted this support to students identified to need additional SEL support and get them more engaged in the school community. Further, these after-school activities are able to utilize outdoor spaces associated with the school and pilot funds to participate in trips focused on ecology.

### Sustainability of the pilot

The pilot team's strategies for sustainability are focused on using the innovation to 1. further enhance pre-existing programs at MGWS and 2. create and foster relationships in support of outdoor education.

The outdoor classrooms, outdoor learning special, and several after-school programs all existed prior to this award. These programs had buy-in with administration and staff which promoted the successful implementation of the expanded initiatives of this pilot. The pilot helps further target student engagement, student SEL development, and provides training to teachers interested in expanding outdoor education at the school.

The second strategy for sustainability focuses on fostering relationships with others in support of outdoor learning. The pilot team invited school board members to the live Awardee Announcement in October 2022 and plans to make a presentation to the school board in April 2023. The current budget proposal for the 2023-24 school year contains elements of the pilot including the Browne Center work and staffing for the Woodland and Wonder special. The hope is that this outreach will promote the sustainability of initiatives. Community relationships, including students' parents, are also being cultivated. On each local preserve field trip, parent volunteers are requested from each classroom. During the first semester, each classroom had 1-3 parents volunteer to actively engage in the citizen science project, SEL work, and team building. A survey to obtain their perspective regarding this experience will help gauge community support for the initiative and their interest in sustaining outdoor education.

MGWS faces challenges to sustainability including: finding future funding for outdoor trips and activities, maintaining teacher buy-in, and the future maintenance of outdoor spaces. The majority of pilot funds are being devoted to student and teacher experiences such as field trips, after-school activities, and teacher professional development. Though the student body and participating teachers will move forward having better knowledge and skills for learning outdoors, identifying a different source of ongoing funding is necessary for the maintenance of the innovation. Currently, the pilot team is looking at a variety of potential sources including the MGWS PTO, the Marshwood Educational Foundation, and other community organizations such as the local rotary club. Though finding additional funding to ensure sustainability is a challenge, it is an ongoing consideration for the team. With regard to the maintenance of teacher buy-in, the team recognizes that changing one's teaching practice is challenging.

The ongoing provision of professional development, as well as, inquiring about outdoor learning during the hiring process at MGWS are two ways in which the pilot team hopes to promote the sustainability of this innovation. With regard to the maintenance of outdoor spaces, the outdoor learning committee is proposing a Spring Community Night to involve students, parents, and members of the community. The objective of this event is to aid in the maintenance of our outdoor spaces and foster support for outdoor learning. In addition, the pilot team is in the process of establishing a student recess club to maintain the outdoor classrooms throughout the school year. Summer maintenance of gardens and the orchard continue to be aspects of the initiative that remain unresolved. Though challenges related to funding, teacher buy-in, and space maintenance continue to be areas of concern, the pilot team at MGWS continues to be cognizant of them and continually works to address them.