

## RREV School Snapshot – RSU 73 Spruce Mountain Elementary

### 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, RSU 72 Spruce Mountain Elementary received an award from RREV to implement its *Nature Ed* project. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education Accelerated category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- To address the truancy, behavioral, and teacher engagement needs of the school.
- To increase teachers' confidence in planning and executing outdoor education lessons.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Creating a library of standards-based lessons, units, and projects focused on the outdoors for teachers to use in their science, social studies, reading, writing, and math classes.
- Provide teachers with appropriated professional development on outdoor learning.
- Building a greenhouse that acts as an outdoor classroom.
- To have all students and teachers in at least one outdoor learning experience in 2022-2023.

### Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

#### Budget

Category	Year 1
Personal Services – Salaries and Stipend	\$1,000
Professional Development	\$6,000
Instructional Supplies	\$4,000
Outdoor gear	\$29,000
Property – Learning Site Development/Construction	\$60,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

- **Students involved:** All the approximately 311 students from Grades 3, 4, and 5.
- **Educators involved:** Six teachers are directly involved (teachers from Grade 4, the principal, the school social worker.)

### Responsiveness of the pilot

RSU 72 Spruce Mountain Elementary's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **It aligns with the school culture.** In the last few years, different teachers have implemented diverse initiatives to integrate outdoor learning into students' experiences, such as Fun Fridays and the Kids Winter Games. Some teachers received training and implemented an outdoor education program with Grade 4 students. However, these efforts have been either temporary

or impacted only specific classes. The school already has two rustic outdoor classrooms, access to a swamp, forests, and trails. The school expects this award will unify efforts, add sustainability, and overcome identified barriers by teachers to implement an outdoor program, such as “materials, lesson plan ideas that integrate with standards, differentiating for different learning styles, and space,” as cited in the proposal.

- **It addresses concerns raised by students.** The school distributes regularly a social and emotional survey among students. Its findings and internal data showed that out of the 600 behavior incidents in the 2021-2022 school year, the majority happened in the classroom and were overwhelmingly related to failure to follow directions and off-task behavior; that the number of truant students increased by 140% over the past 3 years; and that 19% of our students have an extremely elevated risk of behavioral and emotional problems.

RSU 72 Spruce Mountain Elementary’s pilot is innovative because:

- **It is an effort to institutionalize good practices.** The project will help to institutionalize outdoor learning and experiential practices across the school, expanding them to all grades, and sustaining the positive outcomes of outdoor experiences for elementary students. When teachers asked Grade 4 students to write persuasively about how nature’s education has been important to their education, they wrote: “We learn how to work together and how to be independent,” “Nature Ed calms me down,” and “Nature Ed is the best thing that happens in my week.”

### Sustainability of the pilot

RSU 72 Spruce Mountain Elementary’s pilot model’s strategy for sustainability includes:

- **Partnerships with the community.** Through their stipend position, the coordinator and leadership team will work with community partners and access grant opportunities to replenish supplies and improve materials. Currently, they are talking with The Healthy Community Coalition to offer some classes to the community in the greenhouse.
- **Commitment to the school district.** The school plans to create an activity where students will showcase the project at the end of the school year. Parents, representatives from the district board of education, local newspapers, and other community members will be invited. The school plans to use social media to spread the project and increase the public’s awareness and support.

### SPRING UPDATE

Implementation Progress Update

Year 1 Challenges

- **Special education needs.** Around 30% of the student body qualifies for special education services. The project team hopes that one of the special education teachers joins the team to adapt the new curriculum to this population.
- **Delay in building the greenhouse.** Because of weather concerns, the contractors advised them to wait until early spring to advance with the construction, which in turn delays the time the school can start using the greenhouse/classroom.

- **The pilot does not have the support of a coach.** The assigned coach stepped down the position in March 2023.

Year 1 Successes