

RREV School Snapshot – SU76: Deer Isle-Stonington CDS

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, SU76 received an award from RREV to implement its *Classrooms in the Community*. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Develop outdoor learning spaces including an ADA accessible nature trail connecting.
- Expand district's existing outdoor and place-based education opportunities.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Hiring a part-time Place-Based Education Integration Specialist, called the Classroom and Community Coordinator, who is responsible for supporting teachers in the development and implementation of place-based education in two distinct forms: outdoor education on-campus and community-centered education opportunities off-campus.
- Improving the school's outdoor infrastructures including expanding the previous nature trail and making it wheelchair accessible, an outdoor classroom adjacent to the nature trail, and repairs to the existing greenhouses.
- Purchasing needed supplies for outdoor education to continue year-round.
- Expanding off-campus opportunities by purchasing a vehicle and safety equipment.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Category	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Personal Services – Salaries	\$69,400	\$69,400	\$138,800
Purchased Professional and Technical Services	\$38,350	—	\$38,350
Purchased Property Services	\$7,500	—	\$7,500
General Supplies	\$2,660	—	\$2,660
Property	\$63,407	—	\$63,407
Total	\$181,317	\$69,400	\$250,717

- 455 of students served in the district in the 2021-2022 school year.
- Grades K-12 across four schools.
- All teachers and staff across the district.

Responsiveness of the pilot

SU76 pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **Outdoor learning responds to the area's specific culture.** The pilot team commented that traditional classroom settings are not always well-attuned to the specific cultural context of SU76. The outdoor education component of the program is designed to make students' experience more hands-on and experiential in ways that align with the culture of the local fishing community.
- **It provides clear connections between the curriculum and the lived experiences of students.** Since a large proportion of students will likely enter the fishing industry, there is often a disconnect between what they learn in school and what they expect to do after graduation. *Classrooms in the Community* addresses this challenge by creating new place-based learning opportunities both on and off campus that center education around the specific context of their community and draw connections between core content and students' lived experiences and plans for the future.
- **The creation of wheelchair accessible outdoor learning spaces ensured equitable access for students and community members.** Not only does the nature trail connect the Deer Isle Stonington Elementary School with the Deer Isle Stonington High School, provide an outdoor space for students, and incorporate an outdoor classroom, but it is also often used by families and community members outside of school hours. By making the trail ADA accessible, the pilot team has ensured all community members can access these outdoor spaces regardless of the level of mobility, thus removing a barrier to both teaching outside and engaging the larger community in the space.

Innovativeness of the pilot

SU76 pilot is innovative because:

- **Teachers can opt in to outdoor and place-based learning.** The pilot designers understood that staff buy-in is critical and teacher capacity had been limited. Direct teacher participation in place-based learning was therefore voluntary rather than mandatory for the 2021–2022 as well as the 2022-2023 school years. All students could still take part in these opportunities through specials and after-school programs, and specific teachers could expand those opportunities during their own class periods. Those who chose to opt in have additional support from the Director of Place-Based Learning in designing and implementing their curriculum. Allowing

teachers to opt in is intended to reduce the burden on them and focus resources on teachers who are most engaged in the program.

- **Teachers and school staff are able to take advantage of new outdoor learning spaces.** The development of the outdoor classroom and ADA accessible trail have provided the necessary spaces for teachers and school staff to engage students in outdoor activities. Learning aids along the trail such as numbers, plant signage, and kiosks featuring student work provide learning opportunities for students as they move through the trail. This space has also been utilized by teachers and school counselors to provide a safe space for individual conversations with students.
- **The outdoor trail provides a space for ongoing community engagement.** The trail has been used to host several official community events and is available to the public, better connecting the community to the school. Both volunteers and community organizations have contributed to maintaining the trail. Events engaging the community such as Pumpkin Carving and December Luminaries are held after school hours and invite families and community members to engage with the trail and school. One of the implementation team members noted receiving positive feedback from families who were able to use the trail outside of school hours.

Sustainability of the pilot

SU76's pilot model's strategy for sustainability includes focusing the upfront investment on the necessary physical infrastructure to facilitate outdoor learning, expanding curriculum materials that utilize the outdoor space for both elementary and secondary curriculums, and building a volunteer network to help maintain the outdoor spaces. The challenges to the sustainability of the pilot are maintaining the role of a Director of Place-Based Learning and the need for future outdoor facilitation professional development for new teachers. It is unclear at this time if district level funds will be made available to support this position or ongoing professional development following the end of the award. The Classroom and Community Coordinator will speak to the School Board in spring 2023 and participate in RREV professional development in April, 2023.