

School Union #76 Centers Local Culture and Livelihoods Through Place-Based Learning



Key findings from ICF's external evaluation of RREV.



Image: A section of the ADA-accessible nature trail at Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary School

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, School Union #76 (SU76) received a RREV award to develop and implement *Classrooms in the Community*, 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 in SU76 Schools.

About SU76's Innovative Learning Model

Classrooms in the Community provides a structure for place-based education throughout the district. This has been accomplished using many different strategies:

- During the 2021-22 school year, the pilot was implemented at Deer Isle-Stonington Elementary School and Sedgwick Elementary School.
- A Director of Place-Based Learning was hired to plan the curriculum and build teacher capacity for outdoor learning.
- Local partnerships with Island Heritage Trust and OceansWide have helped facilitate off-campus community-centered education opportunities through hands-on experience.
- Physical infrastructure for outdoor classes and activities was designed and developed.

What Makes this Learning Model Innovative?

- **Outdoor learning is tailored to local culture**
- **Outdoor learning curriculum makes clear linkages to lived experiences of students**
- **Teachers can opt into outdoor learning when they are comfortable doing so**

Promising Findings

ICF's evaluation of RREV revealed several exciting insights about *Classrooms in the Community*. These include:

- **Students show high levels of engagement and socio-emotional well-being.** Students described outdoor learning as “calming,” “interactive,” “useful,” and “more fun.” These students said being outside helps them focus more on their tasks, as well as learn life skills such as cooperation and teamwork.
- **Outdoor learning has been made relevant to students' lives.** Through community partnerships with OceansWide and Island Heritage Trust, students are able to partake in activities such as SCUBA diving, piloting underwater remotely operated vehicles, and other ocean preservation activities that teach students about science, robotics, and ecology while involving them with their local community.
- **Students have demonstrated academic growth during the 2021-22 school year.** By spring 2022, 97 percent of the student body at participating schools demonstrated academic growth during their participation in the pilot.
- **Students and families reported positive experiences.** Eighty-five percent of students agreed that they were glad they participated in the program, and 78 percent agreed that they liked their experience overall; 100 percent of families said that they would recommend this program to other families.



97%
academic growth



85% glad they participated



78% liked it



100% would recommend

Future Plans

SU76 is excited to be entering its second year of implementing this innovative learning model! Here are some things SU76 has planned to ensure the long-term success of *Classrooms in the Community*.

- **New Director of Place-Based Learning.** Mickie Flores, science teacher at Deer-Isle Stonington Elementary School, will be overseeing the program during the 2022-23 school year.
- **Program expansion.** SU76 administration hopes to expand programming to Brooklin Elementary School and Deer Isle-Stonington High School during the 2022-23 school year.



Image: The greenhouse at Sedgwick Elementary School