131st MAINE LEGISLATURE
FIRST SPECIAL SESSION-2023

Legislative Document

No. 1817

S.P. 732

In Senate, April 27, 2023

An Act to Support Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

Reference to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry suggested and ordered printed.

Presented by Senator BRENNER of Cumberland.

DAREK M. GRANT
Secretary of the Senate

Printed on recycled paper
Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 12 MRSA c. 433 is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 433

IMMERSIVE OUTDOOR EDUCATION

§5301. Definitions

As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

1. Department. "Department" means the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

2. Immersive outdoor education. "Immersive outdoor education" means experiential, holistic and interdisciplinary education that uses the outdoor setting to engage students in educational opportunities about the outdoors and natural resources and industries and supports the health and wellness of students.

3. Outdoor education program provider. "Outdoor education program provider" means an organization that qualifies as a tax-exempt organization under 26 United States Code, Section 501(c)(3) that offers immersive outdoor education.

§5302. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

1. Program established. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension shall establish and administer the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program, referred to in this chapter as "the program," to support immersive outdoor education and to assist school administrative units in partnering with outdoor education programs.

2. Grant requirements. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension shall provide grants to implement the program in order to assist school administrative units in partnering with outdoor education program providers. Grants under the program must be:

A. Distributed to an outdoor education program provider that meets the requirements of section 5303;

B. Used to serve publicly funded students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in schools operated by tribal school committees or students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in public schools in the State, as determined by the sending school administrative unit and the outdoor education program provider based on community needs and the curriculum;

C. Provided to the same school grade each year to ensure that students in subsequent years have an opportunity to participate in the program; and

D. If program funds are limited, prioritized for schools and communities that are historically underserved by outdoor education, including, but not limited to, Indian tribes and nations, migrant students, schools with high numbers of students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, rural and remote schools, students in alternative education programs, students of color, English language learner students and students receiving special education services.
§5303. Outdoor education program provider requirements

This section governs the requirements for outdoor education program providers.

1. Program curricula. The program shall:

A. Use the outdoors and local ecosystems as the primary context to support hands-on learning, including lessons, meals and on-site living;

B. Engage students in safe and age-appropriate activities;

C. Focus on the State's outdoor heritage, science, engineering, technology, mathematics, health, environment and natural resources and sustainability by including a strong academic component that supports overall academic achievement and career trajectories and connects science with other subjects, to support students' understanding of:

   (1) Conserving and developing marine and estuarine resources;
   (2) Conducting scientific research;
   (3) Promoting the State's coastal fishing industries;
   (4) Protecting and managing fish, game and other wildlife and their habitats, including restoring endangered species;
   (5) Promoting agriculture, conservation, forestry, land management and the well-being of domestic animals;
   (6) Safely enjoying the outdoors; and
   (7) Promoting public health;

D. Develop students' social and emotional skills, including teamwork, citizenship, self-awareness and community responsibility;

E. Support students' health and wellness by developing an appreciation for education and recreation in the outdoors;

F. Encourage hands-on engagement, observation, discovery, intellectual curiosity and problem-solving; and

G. Support students and teachers to combat the learning loss associated with the coronavirus pandemic.

2. Program structure. An outdoor education program provider shall:

A. Obtain an educational trip leader permit under section 12863 or operate in accordance with the requirements of section 12863 for educational trip leaders;

B. Provide programs for 3 to 5 days in duration including up to 4 overnights, or day programs when overnight programs are impractical due to health, cultural or capacity considerations;

C. Pursue a sustainable funding model;

D. Collaborate with schools and teachers to access the program;

E. Pledge to provide equitable access to the program to all students;

F. Train educators in educational strategies and field work;
G. Develop and participate in an evaluation program in accordance with section 5305; and

H. Promote high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

§5304. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund

1. Fund established. The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund, referred to in this section as "the fund," is established under the department. The department shall direct funding to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to administer the grant funds and administer the program in accordance with subsection 2. The fund is nonlapsing and may be invested in the same manner as permitted for the investment of other state funds.

2. Use of fund. Beginning in school year 2023-2024, the department shall determine the funding needed for the program and disburse funds to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension. The funding must be sufficient for students in all geographic regions of the State to participate in the program for a 2-night, 3-day experience.

3. Sources of fund. The State Controller shall credit to the fund:
   A. All money appropriated or allocated by the Legislature for inclusion in the fund;
   B. Money from any other source, whether public or private, designated for deposit into or credited to the fund; and
   C. Interest earned or other investment income on balances in the fund.

The department and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension must receive funds for staff and for administrative costs associated with administering the program and the fund.

§5305. Report required

The department, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension and an outdoor education program provider that meets the requirements of section 5303 shall develop an evaluation program and longitudinal study on current and future demographics of students participating in the program for the purpose of ensuring equitable access and to understand the effects of outdoor education on emotional, educational and career trajectories of students who have participated in the program. Beginning December 1, 2023 and annually thereafter, the department and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension shall submit a report evaluating the program to the joint standing committees of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters, inland fisheries and wildlife matters and agriculture, conservation and forestry matters. The report must include an emphasis on the accessibility of the program from a geographic, economic, ethnic and disability focus and the program's effect on state workforce goals.

§5306. Advisory committee

The department shall convene an advisory committee for the purpose of advising and making recommendations to the program and seeking new opportunities to ensure that the State is a nationwide leader in outdoor education, including high school education career training programs. In inviting participation in the advisory committee, the department shall take into consideration geographic and demographic diversity in membership and ensure membership of the committee includes a youth advocate and representatives of all
applicable state agencies, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, the outdoor
education program provider community, the natural resources community and upper
elementary and middle school education.

Sec. 2. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and
allocations are made.

AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY, DEPARTMENT OF

Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund  N427

Initiative: Provides ongoing funding for the University of Maine Cooperative Extension's
administration of the Outdoor School for All Maine Students program to provide grants to
overnight outdoor education program providers partnering with schools and school
administrative units to attend overnight outdoor education programs.

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<td>GENERAL FUND TOTAL</td>
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SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to provide
immersive outdoor education to serve students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in the State.