



132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

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Legislative Document

No. 895

S.P. 384

In Senate, March 11, 2025

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

(EMERGENCY)

Received by the Secretary of the Senate on March 5, 2025. Referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry pursuant to Joint Rule 308.2 and ordered printed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D M Grant".

DAREK M. GRANT
Secretary of the Senate

Presented by Senator BENNETT of Oxford.
Cosponsored by Representative CARLOW of Buxton and
Senators: BRENNER of Cumberland, GROHOSKI of Hancock, GUERIN of Penobscot,
RAFFERTY of York, TIMBERLAKE of Androscoggin, Representatives: MURPHY of
Scarborough, RIELLY of Westbrook.

1 **Emergency preamble.** Whereas, acts and resolves of the Legislature do not
2 become effective until 90 days after adjournment unless enacted as emergencies; and

3 **Whereas**, this legislation establishes an immersive outdoor education program that
4 provides interdisciplinary and experiential education in an outdoor setting, and this
5 legislation creates equitable opportunities for students across this State to have outdoor
6 experiences; and

7 **Whereas**, many children in this State lack opportunities to enjoy and learn about the
8 outdoors because of home circumstances, lack of access or transportation or a deficiency
9 of suitable school or community-based programs; and

10 **Whereas**, the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program will prepare children
11 in this State for future success, will build self-awareness and confidence and will be an
12 opportunity to instill the importance of the State's natural resources industries by
13 encouraging future generations of farmers, foresters, persons who fish commercially and
14 others working outdoors or as stewards of the State's natural resources; and

15 **Whereas**, the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program will begin in school
16 year 2025-2026; and

17 **Whereas**, in the judgment of the Legislature, these facts create an emergency within
18 the meaning of the Constitution of Maine and require the following legislation as
19 immediately necessary for the preservation of the public peace, health and safety; now,
20 therefore,

21 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

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

23 CHAPTER 433

24 IMMERSIVE OUTDOOR EDUCATION

25 §5301. Definitions

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

28 **1. Fund.** "Fund" means the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Fund
29 established within the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service in section 5304.

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

34 **3. Outdoor education program provider.** "Outdoor education program provider"
35 means an organization that offers immersive outdoor education.

36 **4. Program.** "Program" means the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program
37 established by the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service pursuant to section
38 5302.

1 **§5302. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program**

2 **1. Program established.** The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service
3 shall establish and administer the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program to
4 support immersive outdoor education and to assist school administrative units in partnering
5 with outdoor education programs.

6 **2. Grant requirements.** Beginning in school year 2025-2026, the University of
7 Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall provide grants to implement the program in
8 order to assist school administrative units in partnering with outdoor education program
9 providers. Grants under the program must be:

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

12 B. Used to serve publicly funded students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in schools
13 operated by tribal school committees or students enrolled in grade 4 to grade 8 in
14 publicly funded schools in the State, as determined by the sending school
15 administrative unit and the outdoor education program provider based on community
16 needs and the curriculum. A student receiving home-school instruction is eligible to
17 participate in the program as provided by Title 20-A, section 5021. For purposes of
18 this paragraph, "publicly funded school" means a school required to participate in the
19 system of learning results established in Title 20-A, section 6209;

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

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

28 **§5303. Outdoor education program provider requirements**

29 This section governs the requirements for outdoor education program providers.

30 **1. Program curricula.** The program must:

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

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

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

39 (1) Conserving and developing marine and estuarine resources;

40 (2) Conducting scientific research;

41 (3) Promoting the State's coastal fishing industries;

- 1 (4) Protecting and managing fish, game and other wildlife and their habitats,
- 2 including restoring endangered species;
- 3 (5) Promoting agriculture, conservation, forestry, land management and the well-
- 4 being of domestic animals;
- 5 (6) Safely enjoying the outdoors; and
- 6 (7) Promoting public health;
- 7 D. Develop students' social and emotional skills, including teamwork, citizenship, self-
- 8 awareness and community responsibility;
- 9 E. Support students' health and wellness by developing an appreciation for education
- 10 and recreation in the outdoors;
- 11 F. Encourage hands-on engagement, observation, discovery, intellectual curiosity and
- 12 problem-solving; and
- 13 G. Support students and teachers to combat the learning loss associated with the
- 14 COVID-19 pandemic.

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

- 16 A. Comply with the requirements of section 12863 regarding educational trip leaders;
- 17 B. Provide outdoor programs for a 2-night, 3-day experience or day programs when
- 18 overnight programs are impractical due to health or cultural considerations;
- 19 C. Pursue a sustainable funding model;
- 20 D. Collaborate with schools and teachers to provide access to the program;
- 21 E. Pledge to provide equitable access to the program to all students;
- 22 F. Train educators in educational strategies and field work;
- 23 G. Develop and participate in an evaluation program in accordance with section 5305;
- 24 and
- 25 H. Promote high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

26 **§5304. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Fund**

27 **1. Fund established.** The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Fund is

28 established within the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service. The University

29 of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall administer grant funds for the program in

30 accordance with subsection 2. The fund is nonlapsing and may be invested in the same

31 manner as permitted for the investment of other state funds.

32 **2. Use of fund.** For school year 2025-2026 and each school year thereafter, the

33 University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall determine the funding needed for

34 the program. The funding must be sufficient for students in all geographic regions of the

35 State to participate in the program for a 2-night, 3-day experience.

36 **3. Sources of fund.** The State Controller shall credit to the fund:

- 37 A. All money appropriated or allocated by the Legislature for inclusion in the fund;
- 38 B. Money from any other source, whether public or private, designated for deposit into
- 39 or credited to the fund; and

