

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE

S.P. 202 - L.D. 550

An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools

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

Sec. 1. 7 MRSA c. 10-E is enacted to read:

CHAPTER 10-E

MAINE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

§320-T. Definitions

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

1. Farm and sea to school learning program. "Farm and sea to school learning program" means a program that incorporates agricultural-based education, hands-on learning through school gardens and increased access to local foods through local procurement by school meal programs; improves access to local seafood sourcing by school meal programs; and provides seafood education in schools.

2. Fund. "Fund" means the Maine Experiential Education Program Fund established in section 320-V.

3. Program. "Program" means the Maine Experiential Education Program established in section 320-U.

4. Public school. "Public school" has the same meaning as in Title 20-A, section 1, subsection 24.

5. School administrative unit. "School administrative unit" has the same meaning as in Title 20-A, section 1, subsection 26.

6. Student. "Student" means an individual enrolled in prekindergarten to grade 12 in a public school or school administrative unit.

§320-U. Maine Experiential Education Program

The Maine Experiential Education Program is established to support the outdoor, experiential and farm and sea to school learning program needs of public schools and school administrative units.

1. Program administration. The department shall administer the program. In administering the program, the department may collaborate with the Department of Education and other state agencies and nonprofit organizations that support farm and sea to school learning programs, local food procurement and other experiential learning initiatives in public schools and school administrative units.

2. Purposes. The program shall:

A. Develop and manage a grant program to help public schools and school administrative units create staff positions that support:

(1) The learning and academic development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to provide experiential hands-on learning;

(2) The health and physical development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to help students build connections between the food that students and their communities produce and the food that they prepare and eat; and

(3) The emotional and behavioral development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to build, expand and maintain school gardens and other experiential learning spaces; and

B. Provide ongoing support to public school educators engaged in experiential hands-on education initiatives for continuing education and professional development opportunities.

§320-V. Maine Experiential Education Program Fund

1. Fund established. The Maine Experiential Education Program Fund is established within the department. The fund is nonlapsing and may be invested in the same manner as permitted for investment of other state funds. The fund must be held separate and apart from all other money, funds and accounts. Any balance remaining in the fund at the end of the fiscal year must be carried forward to the next fiscal year.

2. Use of fund. The department shall use money in the fund to:

A. Provide multiyear grants to public schools and school administrative units to help establish experiential education positions and outdoor educator positions within the public schools and school administrative units through a cost-sharing agreement in accordance with the following provisions.

(1) In the first grant year, the fund covers the full cost of salary and benefits, or stipend, of a position; in the 2nd grant year, the fund covers 2/3 of the cost of salary and benefits, or stipend, for the same position and the public school or school administrative unit covers 1/3 of the cost; in the 3rd grant year, the fund covers 1/3 of the cost of salary and benefits, or stipend, for the same position and the public school or school administrative unit covers 2/3 of the cost; and, in subsequent grant

years, the public school or school administrative unit covers the full cost of salary and benefits, or stipend, for the same or similar position.

(2) Grants must be made to public schools and school administrative units in a manner that ensures the public schools and school administrative units create experiential education positions and outdoor educator positions that meet the outdoor, experiential or farm and sea to school education learning program needs of the public schools and school administrative units.

(3) Grants must be developed and dispersed so that public schools and school administrative units gradually assume full financial responsibility for the positions as described in subparagraphs (1) and (2) over a period not to exceed 3 years from the awarding of the grant for any individual public school or school administrative unit.

In dispersing grant money from the fund, the department shall prioritize opportunities to expand the range of positions funded by the fund, including such positions as stipend garden coaches, educational technicians and teachers; and

B. Provide for a staff position within the department to administer the program and the fund.

3. Fund sources. The following must be paid into the fund:

A. All money appropriated or allocated by the Legislature for inclusion in the fund;

B. All interest earned from investments of the fund; and

C. All money designated for deposit into the fund from any source, public or private.

§320-W. Evaluation and reporting

The department shall monitor and evaluate the program and submit an annual report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters and the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters describing the successes and challenges of instituting experiential education in public schools and school administrative units.

§320-X. Rules

The department shall adopt rules to implement this chapter. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Sec. 2. Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute support. As part of the Maine Experiential Education Program established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, chapter 10-E, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry may provide support to the Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute in collaboration with the Maine Farm and Sea to School Network, other appropriate state agencies and nonprofit organizations that support farm and sea to school learning programs as defined in Title 7, section 320-T, subsection 1 and local food procurement initiatives in the State's public schools and school administrative units. Support under this section includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that public schools and school administrative units, including those participating in the Maine Experiential Education Program, have access to professional learning opportunities and coaching designed to ensure the creation of achievable goals for the purposes of:

1. Enhancing the learning and academic development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units have the capacity necessary to provide the deeper learning and knowledge gained through experiential hands-on learning; and

2. Enhancing access to high-quality products grown and harvested in the State through increased local procurement and connections between schools, students and local farms and fisheries.

Sec. 3. First annual report. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry shall submit its first annual report pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, section 320-W within one year from the effective date of this Act.

Sec. 4. Contingent effective date. This Act does not take effect unless:

1. The United States Congress, United States Department of Agriculture or other public or private entity creates an opportunity for the State to access funding for the purpose of implementing and managing the Maine Experiential Education Program established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, chapter 10-E; and

2. The Commissioner of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry notifies the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Senate, the Clerk of the House of Representatives and the Revisor of Statutes that the funding opportunity under subsection 1 exists and that funding has been secured.

In no event may this Act become effective until 90 days after adjournment of the First Regular Session of the 132nd Legislature.