

STATE OF MAINE

IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD
TWO THOUSAND TWENTY-FIVE

S.P. 384 - L.D. 895

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 industries and supports the health and wellness of students.

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

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

§5302. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

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

2. Grant requirements. Beginning in school year 2025-2026, except as otherwise provided in section 5304, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service 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 publicly funded 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. A student receiving home-school instruction is eligible to participate in the program as provided by Title 20-A, section 5021. For purposes of this paragraph, "publicly funded school" means a school required to participate in the system of learning results established in Title 20-A, section 6209;

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 must:

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 COVID-19 pandemic.

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

A. Comply with the requirements of chapter 927 regarding licensed guides, youth camp trip leaders or educational trip leaders, as appropriate.

B. Provide outdoor programs for a 2-night, 3-day experience or day programs when overnight programs are impractical due to health or cultural considerations;

C. Pursue a sustainable funding model;

D. Collaborate with schools and teachers to provide access to 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 Program Fund

1. Fund established. The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Fund is established within the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall administer grant funds for 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. For school year 2025-2026 and each school year thereafter, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall determine the funding needed for the program. 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 University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service may use funds for staff and for administrative costs associated with administering grant funds for the program. The University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service is not required to provide grants under section 5302, develop an evaluation and longitudinal study under section 5305, convene an advisory committee under section 5306 or undertake any other work or provide any other services for which it does not have sufficient funding.

§5305. Report; evaluation

Except as otherwise provided in section 5304, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service, in consultation with the advisory committee under section 5306, shall develop an evaluation 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 March 1, 2026 and annually thereafter, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall submit a report regarding the study 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 information regarding the accessibility of the program from a geographic, economic, ethnic and disability perspective and the program's effect on state workforce goals.

§5306. Advisory committee

Except as otherwise provided in section 5304, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall convene an advisory committee for the purpose of advising and making recommendations regarding 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 members onto the advisory committee, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service shall take into consideration geographic and demographic diversity in membership and ensure that membership of the committee

includes a youth advocate and representatives of all applicable state agencies, 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.

UNIVERSITY OF MAINE SYSTEM, BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE

Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program Fund N427

Initiative: Provides base allocations to authorize expenditures for the University of Maine Cooperative Extension Service's administration of the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program in the event that funds from public or private sources are received.

| OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS | 2025-26 | 2026-27 |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| All Other | \$500 | \$500 |
| OTHER SPECIAL REVENUE FUNDS TOTAL | \$500 | \$500 |

Emergency clause. In view of the emergency cited in the preamble, this legislation takes effect when approved.