

March 11, 2025

Dear Valued Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee,

I am writing to express my strong support for LD 895, An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program.

LD 895 provides an important equity measure for Maine students. Outdoor education is often perceived as a privilege, with access frequently determined by a student's socioeconomic background. This bill helps ensure that every student has the opportunity to experience immersive outdoor education.

Thanks to a generous grant, my fourth grade students had the opportunity to attend a two-night outdoor education experience at the Ecology School. Every student was about to attend, regardless of socioeconomic status or academic or physical ability. My students carried that experience with them throughout the year, bringing practices they learned back to the school. They brought attention to the food waste happening at our school and began tracking the data by weighing the waste each day. The lessons they learned about ecology were extended throughout the year as they wrote essays about the ecology of their school grounds. My class came back more closely bonded, and more empathetic with one another.

Outdoor immersive education allows all its participants the opportunity to grow academically and socially. It allows students to practice healthy risk taking, and it shows them a world beyond cell phones and social media. All our Maine students deserve to have this opportunity.

LD 895 is an investment in the future of Maine's students. By providing equitable access to immersive outdoor education, the bill addresses key needs in both academic and social-emotional development, while also nurturing a generation of students who will be better prepared to care for our planet. I encourage you to support this bill that will support Maine's students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Becky Hallowell

Whitefield, Maine

2024 Lincoln County Teacher of the Year

2025 Maine Teacher of the Year