



Statement of Support for LD 895
An Act to Support Immersive Outdoor Education by Establishing
The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program

March 11, 2025

Senator Bennett and members of the distinguished Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Peg Willauer-Tobey. I live in the town of Brunswick, and as a lifelong outdoor educator and current member of the leadership team at Chewonki Foundation in Wiscasset, Maine. I am submitting testimony in support of LD 895.

This bill, LD 895, creates the opportunity for schools to apply for and receive funding for their students to attend an Outdoor School Program. It is their choice to take advantage of this opportunity, as well as decide which program aligns with their vision for the education of their students.

Thirty-five years ago, when I began my career, I started as an outdoor educator, working for Outward Bound and Chewonki. Through those early experiences, I developed a deep belief in the power of providing immersive experiences in nature and challenging young people to step beyond their comfort zones, fostering self-discovery, resilience, leadership, and a deep sense of environmental stewardship. Equipping young people with the skills and values needed to navigate an increasingly complex and changing world.

Today, with research backing up the theory, there is little argument that Outdoor Education has the power to transform lives.

The Network of Outdoor Schools in Maine all come together to address key issues facing young people today:

Challenges and Trends for Young People	Maine Outdoor Schools for All
Increasing Social Disconnection & Need for Stronger Community	Foster Deep Personal & Community Connections
Declining Engagement & Resilience in Learning	Encourage Curiosity & Learning
Overload of Information & Rising Mental Fatigue	Provide Space, Structure, and the Environment to Slow Down & Reflect

Growing Environmental Challenges & Need for Action	Inspire Shared Engagement and Care for the Natural World
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As pointed out by my colleague Dr. Anica Miller Rushing below, the research is clear. Having an extended immersive Outdoor Education experience is transformative for Students, Schools, and communities.

Research Summary Supporting Immersive Outdoor Education:

Immersive outdoor education helps make the classroom more relevant:

Outdoor education strengthens classroom learning by providing real-world applications. Studies show academic gains across subjects, with science scores improving by over 26% (Parrish et al., 2005).

Immersive outdoor education promotes better emotional health:

Outdoor school participation improves conflict resolution, cooperation, and self-esteem. Up to 93% of children report that nature helps them manage emotions, fostering engagement and peer learning (Beyer et al., 2015; Parrish et al., 2005). A three-day outdoor program led to lasting improvements in social acceptance and behavioral conduct (Garst et al., 2001).

Addressing Nature Deficit Disorder:

Dr. Richard Louv (2005) coined the term “Nature Deficit Disorder” to highlight the negative effects of reduced outdoor exposure, including diminished sensory engagement, attention issues, and higher obesity rates (Dyment & Bell, 2008). Studies indicate that immersive nature experiences improve ecological literacy and overall well-being (Children and Nature Network, 2023).

Immersive outdoor education is important for teachers - supporting STEM Learning:

Evidence shows that engaging students with STEM educational experiences related to locally-relevant outdoor heritage provides teachers with critical 21st-century skill-building skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking. Skills that are valuable tools for their students (NRC, 2011, 2012).

Please join me in supporting LD 895 and give the young people of Maine an educational boost.

With appreciation,



Peg Willauer-Tobey
Director of Philanthropy and Alumni Engagement
Chewonki