
TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 550

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AN ACT TO SUPPORT OUTDOOR, AGRICULTURAL-BASED AND HANDS-ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 13, 2025

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, the director of communications and government relations for the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committee of the Maine School Boards Association in support of L.D. 550, An Act to Support Outdoor, Agricultural-based and Hands-on Experiential Learning in Public Schools. We represent more than 1,700 school board members across all regions of Maine.

Our members believe this bill takes a constructive, supportive approach that could provide our schools and students with additional capacity and resources to develop new approaches to boost student engagement and proficiency.

Across the state, many schools are already working to develop the outdoor, agricultural-based and hands-on experiential learning experiences described in this bill. As just a few examples:

- MSAD 17 holds engineering and science classes at nearby Roberts Farm.
- MSAD 1 in Presque Isle operates an educational farm supplying produce sent to local stores and restaurants.
- Maine Teacher of the Year Becky Hallowell puts outdoor learning at the center of her educational approach in her “Outdoor Wonderful Learning Space” along the Sheepscot River.

Studies show that nature and outdoor-based learning are beneficial for our students. It improves student engagement, decreases negative behaviors, and serves as a powerful alternative to technology and social media.

While many Maine schools have embraced this approach, we know many districts do not have the funding to create or expand their own efforts. L.D. 550 would provide crucial resources to schools to jumpstart these efforts. And by operating as a grant program – rather than a state mandate – it will allow districts to choose to opt in if they want to.

This would preserve local curriculum control and provide useful financial incentives to help districts looking to move in this direction. It would also seek funding from private, nonprofit, or federal sources, putting less pressure on state and local taxpayers. Our association is fully in support of this approach to funding, and we believe it will provide valuable resources that will boost student engagement and academic success. We urge you to support L.D. 550.