

Margot Downs  
Yarmouth  
LD 1543

To the esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,  
My name is Margot Downs. As a high school educator and the advisor for our school's Environmental Action Club, I enthusiastically support the establishment of the Maine Green Schools Network LD 1543.

A Green Schools Network will support our school communities in several ways: by making buildings more efficient, reducing waste, and incorporating environmental learning into the curriculum. It will achieve this by reducing barriers to sharing ideas and resources across the state. This initiative promotes place-based learning, connections with Wabanaki studies, and pathways for students to explore green careers.

Maine is already a leader in environmental education, with strong community partnerships and a state climate education policy. However, we lack a statewide network to effectively connect schools with resources and each other. Currently, schools often duplicate efforts or miss out on successful strategies. My amazing experience at the recent Climate&ME Youth Leadership Conference in Orono underscored this need. There, I met with other educators and discussed both the rewards and challenges of supporting students passionate about addressing today's environmental challenges. We need a Green Schools Network to facilitate these vital conversations regularly.

This network, a collaboration between the Maine Department of Education, the Maine Environmental Education Association, and other stakeholders, will connect schools with partners and funding, enabling them to become more cost-effective and sustainable. Let me emphasize that this is not a mandate; it's a voluntary collaboration for those who choose to participate.

The benefits are clear:

For students: Real-world learning, improved academic skills, community engagement, and career preparation in growing fields.

For schools: Cost savings and infrastructure improvements through climate-conscious adaptations.

For teachers: A supportive network for sharing curriculum, projects, and best practices, and support in implementing Next Generation Science Standards.

This network aligns with Maine's climate action plan, outdoor economy roadmap, and environmental literacy plan. It does not carry a fiscal note but lays the groundwork for future funding opportunities. Investing in climate education is investing in Maine's future workforce, preparing our students for careers in critical sectors like agriculture, renewable energy, and waste management.

In short, the Maine Green Schools Network is a common-sense, collaborative, and cost-effective way to support our educators, empower our students, and build more sustainable communities to thrive in Maine. I urge you to support its establishment.

Thank you,  
Margot Downs