

**LR 1018, Act To Support Outdoor School for All Maine Students**

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

**Sec. 1. 12 MRSA c. 928** is enacted to read:

**CHAPTER 928**

**Immersive Outdoor Education**

**§ 12864. 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 Fund established in section 12867.

**2. Program.** "Program" means the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program established in section 12866.

**3. Outdoor School for All Program.** Means an immersive outdoor education program offering outdoor education in a multiple day and overnight setting that involves students in experiential, holistic, interdisciplinary learning, including hands-on engagement, observation and discovery, problem solving, teamwork, citizenship, reflection, self-awareness, responsibility and a strong academic component by encouraging intellectual curiosity, supporting overall academic achievement, linking science to other subjects and emphasizing connections between individual and community responsibility, health, environmental and natural resources issues, and the economy.

**4. Students.** "Students" means publicly funded students enrolled in grades 4 through 8 in schools in the State.

**5. Student Class.** "Student class" means the grade chosen by the sending school district and overnight environmental program provider, based on the community needs and curriculum, which will either be the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup> grade in their district. This grade will become the first class of students involved in the program for that district and subsequent years will occur in the same grade such that every child has an opportunity for this program.

**6. Overnight outdoor education program provider.** "Overnight outdoor education program provider" means a 501(c)(3) organization that:

**A. Pursues a sustainable funding model;**

**B. Utilizes overnight environmental learning experiences, including lessons, meals, and on-campus living;**

**C. Engages in safe and age-appropriate activities;**

**D. Pledges to provide equitable access to students in Maine;**

**E. Partners with schools and teachers to access programming;**

**F. Uses the outdoors and local ecosystems as the primary context to support learning;**

**G. Primarily focuses on Maine outdoor heritage, science, natural resources, and sustainability, as the core focal points of curricular offerings;**

**H. Trains educators in educational strategies and field work;**

- I. Operates in accordance with requirements set forth within Title section 12863 for educational trip leaders; and
- J. Participates in an evaluation program that seeks to understand current and future demographics of students participating in the programs.

#### **§ 12865. Findings.**

- A. Since the 1960s, many Maine students have attended Outdoor School programs, unique week-long, field science programs giving students the opportunity to study natural sciences and responsible use of natural resources, including the Maine Outdoor Learning Initiative programming.
- B. Currently, less than a quarter of Maine students are able to attend Outdoor School programming, with rural and lower income districts having been particularly challenged in accessing these experiences.
- C. Every Maine student in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, or 8<sup>th</sup> grade should have the opportunity to attend an outdoor school program or a comparable outdoor education program.
- D. Outdoor School builds self-sufficiency and leadership skills, helps students understand the interdependence of Maine's rural and urban areas, develops critical thinking skills, and improves school attendance and retention rates.
- E. Outdoor School for All Maine Students provides a unique setting that allows students to build confidence by demonstrating strengths that may have been less apparent in the classroom setting and provides teachers with opportunities to see their students and peers in a new light, allowing for relationship building that adds to the in-classroom experience.
- H. Therefore, the Legislature intends to establish a statewide grant program and corresponding outdoor education program to address those needs and to ensure that all students have a chance to benefit from an outdoor school education.

#### **§ 12866. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program**

- 1. Program established. The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program is established, and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension shall administer the program to assist school districts in partnering with overnight outdoor education program providers to create and provide outdoor school for all programming for students.
- 2. Purposes of the program. The program is established to provide grants in order to accomplish the following:
  - A. Support immersive outdoor education program experiences for students that engage and challenge every student by providing individualized learning opportunities that enhance student learning, and increase student achievement especially in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and seek to support students and teachers to combat learning loss from the effects of Covid-19.
  - B. Support
    - 1. Students understanding of conserving and developing marine and estuarine resources; to conduct and sponsor scientific research; to promote and develop the Maine coastal fishing industries;

2. Students understanding of the protection and management of fish, game and non-game wildlife, and habitats, as well as restoration of endangered species; and safe enjoyment of Maine's outdoors; and/or

3. Students understanding of agricultural, conservation, and forest and land management; and of the public health, and well-being of domestic animals;

C. Support students learning about careers in Maine's outdoors and natural resources industries.

D. Support the health and wellness of students in the State by developing in the students an appreciation for education and recreation in the outdoors; and

E. Support collaboration between overnight outdoor education program providers and schools and teachers.

### **3. Requirements**

**A. Overnight environmental program provider.** Grants may only be received by an overnight environmental program provider as defined in section 9924(6), which has partnered with a school or school district.

**B. Programming.** The program will consist of hands-on learning experiences for the identified student class for three to five days in duration and up to four nights; are day programs when overnight programs are impractical due to health, cultural, or capacity considerations; and have a focus on outdoor education aligned with Maine learning standards and the development of social and emotional skills.

### **§ 12867. Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund**

The Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund is established under the jurisdiction and control of the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry. The Department will direct funding to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to administer the grant funds and the program. The fund is non-lapsing and may be invested in the same manner as permitted for investment of other state funds.

#### **1. Use of fund.**

A. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry will determine funding and direct funding to the University of Maine Cooperative Extension to use the money in the fund to provide grants to overnight outdoor education providers for students to attend an overnight outdoor school program in an amount equal to the cost of attendance at the overnight outdoor school program for a two-night, three-day experience. The overnight environmental program providers shall partner with schools and districts in order to be eligible for the funds. In implementing student educational experiences under this chapter, the Department and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension shall ensure equitable access for students in all geographic regions and high levels of accessibility for students with disabilities.

B. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry and University of Maine Cooperative Extension will be allotted appropriate funds for staff and administrative costs associated with managing the program.

C. If funding from the government is limited, for any reason, then grants must be prioritized for schools and communities historically underserved by outdoor education. These schools and communities may include, but are not limited to, tribal nations, including tribal schools, migrant students, schools with high populations of students who receive free and reduced-price lunches,

rural and remote schools, students in alternative learning education environments, students of color, English language learner students and students receiving special education services.

**2. Sources of fund.** The following must be paid into the fund:

A. All money appropriated or allocated by the Legislature for inclusion in the fund;

B. All interest earned from investments of the fund; and

C. Any money designated for deposit into the fund from any source, public or private.

### **§ 12868. Reporting**

A. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, and overnight outdoor education program providers shall work together to develop an evaluation program that reports demographics of students to ensure equitable access and also seeks to develop longitudinal studies to understand the impacts of outdoor education on emotional, education and career trajectory.

B. Beginning in 2024, the University of Maine Cooperative Extension must submit an annual report to the committees having jurisdiction in education, inland fisheries and wildlife with an evaluation of the program established by this chapter, with an emphasis on the accessibility of the program from a geographic, economic, ethnic, and disability focus, and the program's effect on state workforce goals.

### **§ 12869. Advisory Committee**

A. The Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry shall convene an advisory committee for the purpose of advising the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program upon recommendations it desires to make and to seek new opportunities to ensure that Maine is a leader in outdoor education, including high school outdoor education career training programs.

B. When selecting the members of the committee, the Commissioner shall take into consideration geographic and demographic diversity and shall ensure that the committee has representatives of applicable agencies, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, outdoor education provider community, the natural resources community, upper elementary and middle school education, and youth advocate position.

**Sec. 2. Appropriations and allocations.** The following appropriations and allocations are made.  
**Department of \_\_\_\_\_**

#### **Outdoor School for All Maine Students Fund N183**

Initiative: Provides funds to the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry for the funding of the University of Maine Cooperative Extension's administration and funding of the Outdoor School for All Maine Students program, which will provide grants to overnight outdoor education program providers partnering with schools and school districts to attend overnight outdoor education programs.

<b>GENERAL FUND</b>	<b>2023-2024</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>
All Other	\$6,200,000	\$6,200,000	\$6,200,000

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GENERAL FUND TOTAL

## **SUMMARY**

This bill establishes the Outdoor School for All Maine Students Program and Fund to support immersive outdoor education program experiences for publicly funded students in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 in the State that operates in accordance with the Educational Trip Leader Program. Individual Maine students will be able to access the program once, and schools may access the funding annually. It provides grants for schools in the State to attend an overnight outdoor education program. Grants must be in an amount equal to the cost of attendance at an outdoor education program and must be distributed to schools in a manner that equitably ensures schools throughout the state attend overnight outdoor education programs.