

RREV School Snapshot – Lee Academy

Background

In June 2020, the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) was awarded a \$16.9 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K–12 Education Models program to implement the Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures (RREV) program. The overarching purpose of RREV is to support Maine educators to create, implement, and disseminate responsive and innovative educational models that help all students learn and thrive.

Pilot Description

In May 2022, Lee Academy received an award from RREV to implement two pathways for students: ExCEL (Experiences Create Excellent Leaders) program. The pilot consists of two pathways. The first pathway, called the ExCEL pathways (Experience Creates Excellent Leaders), focuses on alternative education strategies for students who struggle in traditional classroom settings. The second pathway, called the Outdoor Leadership *Program*, offers students an immersive outdoor and environmental educational experience. This pilot is in the Multiple Pathways category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Help students find success in school, as community members, and in the future by providing an experiential approach to education that offers a personalized and student-centered pathway towards graduation and beyond.
- Improve attendance rates, academic achievement, graduation rates, and setting and reaching post-graduation targets, especially for students who are at risk for not graduating.
- Develop a connection between learning and self-development to promote student wellness and personal growth.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- ExCEL pathway
 - Students work with instructors to develop education and careers goals, learn more about career opportunities through real life experiences such as, and working towards job-shadowing and internships, and create and complete a learning plan to prepare them for careers that interest them.
 - Students are learning hands-on through hands-on experiences and developing career applicable skills while contributing to the community through service-learning projects.
- Outdoor Leadership Program pathway
 - Students meet for a full day, every other day, to participate in an immersive outdoor-based integrated curriculum that provides students with deeper connections to their learning.
 - Students participate in a series of service-learning based outdoor projects, such as trail work and community gardening, that occur both at school and with local nonprofit organizations.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Category	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Personal Services – Salaries and Stipend	\$118,800.00	–	\$118,800.00
Employee Benefits	\$30,779.27	–	\$30,779.27
Purchased Professional & Technical Services	\$28,000.00	–	\$28,000.00
Other Purchased Services	\$4500.00	–	\$4500.00
General Supplies	\$25,419.84	–	\$25,419.84
Property – Student Transportation Vehicles	\$37,000.00	–	\$37,000.00
Miscellaneous and Debt Service	\$5,500.00	–	\$5,500.00
Total	\$250,000	–	\$250,000

- 21 of students served across both programs
- Grades 10-12 served
- 4 teachers directly involved

Responsiveness of the pilot

Lee Academy's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **The Alternative pathway is a response to the socio-economic distress the community has experienced over the past few years.** Students in Northern Penobscot, Southern Aroostook and Northern Washington counties have often struggled to meet graduation rates and maintain attendance. Coupled with the economic downturn the community has experienced over the past year as a result of the pandemic and high rates of poverty and substance abuse, school leaders noticed that students were struggling. As one member of the implementation team put it, "When you see family members lose jobs, kids don't see a lot of hope or options for careers." In response to these challenges, school leaders wanted to focus on relationship-building to establish trust with the students and the community. By exposing students to career options such as health care, food service, and trade industries through workplace visits and job shadowing, the program will develop students' interests and motivation while contributing to the economic resilience of the community.
- **The Outdoor Leadership pathway leverages the growing outdoor industry in the community.** Lee Academy is situated in a community that offers exciting outdoor careers in the forest, recreation, and hospitality industries. The Outdoor Leadership pathway fosters a mutually beneficial relationship between students and the community; students complete hands-on, outdoor service-learning projects that connects them with careers opportunities while the community makes connections with the school to grow outreach and offer more services.

Innovativeness of the pilot

Lee Academy's pilot is innovative because:

- **It gives students agency and responsibility over their learning.** The pilot implementation team discussed how this pilot program is unlike anything Lee Academy has offered before. The full curricular model that offers students credits and is tailored towards their needs has created a

newfound excitement for learning amongst students. School leaders have already begun to notice positive outcomes as a result of the programs, including increased attendance, positive feedback from teachers and community partners, and overall “aspirations” of students, including developing concrete goals, such as filling out college applications. The program has allowed students to go out of their comfort zones to try new learning experiences, and school leaders hope to continue inspiring this excitement among students.

Sustainability of the pilot

Lee Academy’s pilot model’s strategy for sustainability includes:

- **Securing additional funding by attracting surrounding district populations that do not usually attend Lee Academy.** Lee Academy hopes to expand the program to neighboring districts that could tuition their students to Lee Academy. Additionally, Lee Academy hopes to more students from “choice” towns.
- **Finding support through community partners.** Lee Academy hopes to raise money through philanthropy, a student-run entrepreneurial program, and contributions from key partners in the surrounding area, including local businesses.
- **Building teacher capacity through professional development.** Lee Academy will work with key teaching staff who have experience and success working with at-risk students to design some of the details of the program and set the tone for professional expectations. This in turn will help other teachers and counseling staff to build capacity and reach a larger population of students.