

RREV School Snapshot – MSAD 61 Lake Region Middle School

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 August 2022, MSAD 61 Lake Region Middle School received an award from RREV to implement its *Outdoor Learning Spaces* project. This pilot is in the Outdoor Education Accelerated category.

The goals of this pilot are to:

- Foster student engagement and improve social emotional skills.
- Integrate hands-on activities and outdoor field research into the curriculum.
- Improve students’ academic and behavioral outcomes.
- Reduce truancy and improve attitudes toward school.

Key activities of this pilot include:

- Build a greenhouse in collaboration with Grade 8 students by the end of the 2022-2023 school year.
- Build an outdoor pavilion classroom with seating and Wi-Fi access in collaboration with carpentry students from the local high school by the end of 2023.
- Creation of a school-wide online check-out system that lists the materials available and where they are stored, the ongoing projects in the greenhouse, and a sign-up sheet for classes wanting to use the greenhouse and/or the pavilion.
- Professional development sessions to design opportunities for school-wide collaboration and interdisciplinary projects.
- In collaboration with an external educator expert in outdoor learning, adapting current lessons to an outdoor environment.
- Mini-lessons and presentations from the outgoing Grade 8 students to the incoming Grade 6 students.

Exhibit: RREV Award Summary

Budget

Category	Year 1
Personal Services – Salaries and Stipend	\$1,200
Purchased Professional Services	\$5,000
Property – Learning Site Development/Construction	\$93,800
Total	\$100,000

- **Students:** All the approximately 434 students from Grades 6, 7, and 8.
- **Educators:** Twelve teachers directly involved (English, English as a Second Language, Sciences, Social Studies, Math, Special Education, Family and Consumer Sciences, and librarian).

Responsiveness of the pilot

MSAD 61 Lake Region Middle School's pilot is responsive to local needs and/or assets because:

- **It is part of a data-based strategy that aims to improve students' engagement.** In a recent internal survey among Grade 7 and 8 students, the school found that "only 10.2 percent indicated that they highly enjoy coming to school each day, and 18.1 percent of them indicated that they are "very proud" to be a member of the Lake Region school community. When asked if they would enjoy coming to school more if more of their classes were held outside, an overwhelming 81.8 % of the students surveyed responded affirmatively. When asked how they learn best, the top three responses that the students gave were "hands-on activities" (85.6%), "outdoor games and activities" (72.6%), and "outdoor field research" (55.3%)." In response to the findings, the school will use the award to create new structures and systems that will build capacity for increased outdoor education.
- **It reinforces the school counselors' ongoing strategies to improve students' engagement and social emotional skills.** In connection with the lack of engagement, the school is experiencing a concerning increase in student truancy and disruptive behaviors. School counselors are overwhelmed addressing social-emotional challenges among students. The school will use the greenhouse to maintain the restorative practices that are already in place at LRMS to improve students' behavior and connections with the school. The project will help build collaborative skills and teamwork through experiential learning, which in turn will foster academic engagement and develop social-emotional skills. A staff member noted that the outdoor project's outcomes will extend to the staff, and will "improve teacher morale, recruitment, and retainment especially in the face of the ongoing teacher shortage."

Innovativeness of the pilot

MSAD 61 Lake Region Middle School's pilot is innovative because:

- **It requires a substantial shift in instructional practice.** The project requires teachers and coordinators to rethink their approach to teaching and learning to increasingly incorporate outdoor learning into their curriculum. This project will provide a structure for other teachers to feel more comfortable and with resources to include outdoor learning in their practices. The project creates more opportunities for collaboration and curriculum alignment as well. The educators noted that some teachers work in silos. With this project, teachers will have access to training to design opportunities for school-wide collaboration and interdisciplinary projects. As one of the educators noted, "having a more fluid experience that's interconnected through all three grades I think is the biggest part of this innovation."
- **It transforms students into partners in the teaching and learning process.** The school not only granted students requests for more experiential learning—which shows the school commitment to become a student-centered space— but through the project, the school made students co-responsible for the design, implementation, success, and sustainability of the project. Students are responsible for "design[ing] the layout inside the greenhouse and build[ing] the raised beds,

shelves, and seating area [...] and harvest the food that is grown in the greenhouse,” as noted in the proposal.

Sustainability of the pilot

MSAD 61 Lake Region Middle School’s pilot model’s strategy for sustainability includes:

- **Partnerships.** Partnerships with local organizations, such as the Center for an Ecology Based Economy (CEBE) and the Lakes Environmental Association (LEA), to bring experts from the community who can show the students how the skills they are learning in the greenhouse are applicable to the real world; and partnership with local food pantries and businesses to keep the greenhouse running all year long.
- **School district commitment.** The science department has already committed to allocating some of its funds to the project. The school wants to partner with the school district to involve elementary and high school students regularly.

SPRING UPDATE

Implementation Progress Update

Year 1 Challenges

Year 1 Successes