

# Noble Flex Supports Holistic Wellness of Students

Key findings from ICF's external evaluation of RREV.



## 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 promote innovation in Maine schools so that all students across the state have access to high-quality and responsive learning opportunities. In August 2021, Regional School Unit #60 ("Noble Schools") received a RREV award to develop and implement *Be Well Connected* at Noble Flex, which began in the 2021-22 school year. An outside research firm, ICF, was engaged by MDOE to conduct an evaluation of the RREV program, including implementation of this learning model in Noble Schools.



Image: Students in grades 5-9 stand in front of the soon-to-be-occupied learning space

## What Makes this Learning Model Innovative?

- Promotes a culture of inclusion through shared space and activities
- Intentional focus on wellness
- Students have agency in their learning experience

## About Noble Flex's Innovative Learning Model

*Be Well Connected* is a proactive approach to supporting the physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing of all Noble Flex's students. Here's how this has worked:

- During the inaugural 2021-22 school year, 29 students from fifth grade to eighth grade participated in the program. Participation was open to students who submitted an application and received recommendations from teachers and counselors that they were likely to succeed in a hybrid remote and in-person environment.
- Learning coaches cultivate student agency and confidence through project-based learning
- Noble Flex students come together for weekly in-person learning and team-building activities. The RREV award supported construction of a learning space specifically devoted to the Noble Flex program.

## Promising Findings

ICF's evaluation of RREV revealed several exciting insights about *Be Well Connected*. These include:

- **A thriving and supportive school culture that centers student wellness and solidarity.** Several students explained that they felt more comfortable “being their true selves” because of shared values around learning, such as kindness and understanding. For example, one participating student remarked “the whole class is supportive, even if you mess up,” which he said helped him stay motivated even during periods of struggle.
- **Students demonstrated academic growth during the 2021-22 school year.** All participating students who were enrolled for the entire school year passed all their classes. As well, chronic absenteeism decreased from 35 percent to 15 percent among participating students.
- **Students and families reported positive experiences.** Eighty-eight percent of participating students agreed that they were glad they participated in the program, and 79 percent agreed that they liked their experience overall; 100 percent of families said that they would recommend this program to other families.



## Future Plans

Noble is excited to be entering its second year of implementing this innovative learning model! Here are some things Noble has planned to ensure the long-term success of *Be Well Connected*.

- **Moving into a dedicated space.** Noble Flex students will attend their weekly in-person days in a new, purpose-build structure located in town.
- **Hiring a Virtual Wellness Counselor with a social work background.** This individual will provide additional support to students and learning coaches.
- **Conducting more field trips.** Going forward, program leaders intend to embark on more trips off campus, such as visits to local and regional museums.
- **Expanding program offerings to 9th graders.** Noble Flex intends to expand programming to 9th graders to accommodate 8th grade students who wish to continue online learning.



Home to *Be Well Connected*, a project of the RREV (Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures) Initiative through the Maine Department of Education, funded by the US Department of Education's Rethink K-12 Education Models.