

Background and Purpose

This document is intended for school leaders, teachers, and others interested in developing and implementing a Multiple Pathways program for their local context. It summarizes lessons learned from the design and implementation of eight pilots implementing Multiple Pathways education models in Maine.¹ Each of these pilots was responsive to their school's specific needs, but they shared some common features, including:

- **Customization and Personalization** – Multiple Pathways programs give students agency and responsibility over their learning by allowing them to tailor their educational and career journeys to their specific interests, strengths, and goals. This customization can result in more engaged and motivated learners.
- **Diverse Learning Experiences** – Multiple Pathways programs offer a variety of learning experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships, work-study arrangements, project-based learning, outdoor learning, and traditional classroom instruction. This diversity can help students develop a well-rounded skill set.
- **Real-World Relevance** – By incorporating real-world experiences and practical skills training, Multiple Pathways programs bridge the gap between education and the job market. This can enhance graduates' employability and preparedness for the workforce.
- **Inclusivity** – Multiple Pathways programs aim to be inclusive and accessible to a broader range of individuals, including those from underrepresented backgrounds or with diverse learning styles and needs.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships** – They often involve collaborations between educational institutions, employers, and community organizations, fostering a more cohesive and holistic approach to education and workforce development.
- **Industry Alignment** – These programs are frequently designed in close consultation with industry experts, ensuring that curriculum and training are aligned with the current and future needs of the job market.
- **Economic Revitalization and Social Development** – Multiple Pathways programs can have broader economic benefits for communities through building a local workforce.

"Students are able to engage with their work through real-world, project-based learning that helps them learn essential skills."

– Parent, St. George

¹ These pilots were supported by the Maine Department of Education's Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures (RREV) program, which was funded by a \$17 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K-12 Education program.

Key Takeaways from Multiple Pathways Pilots

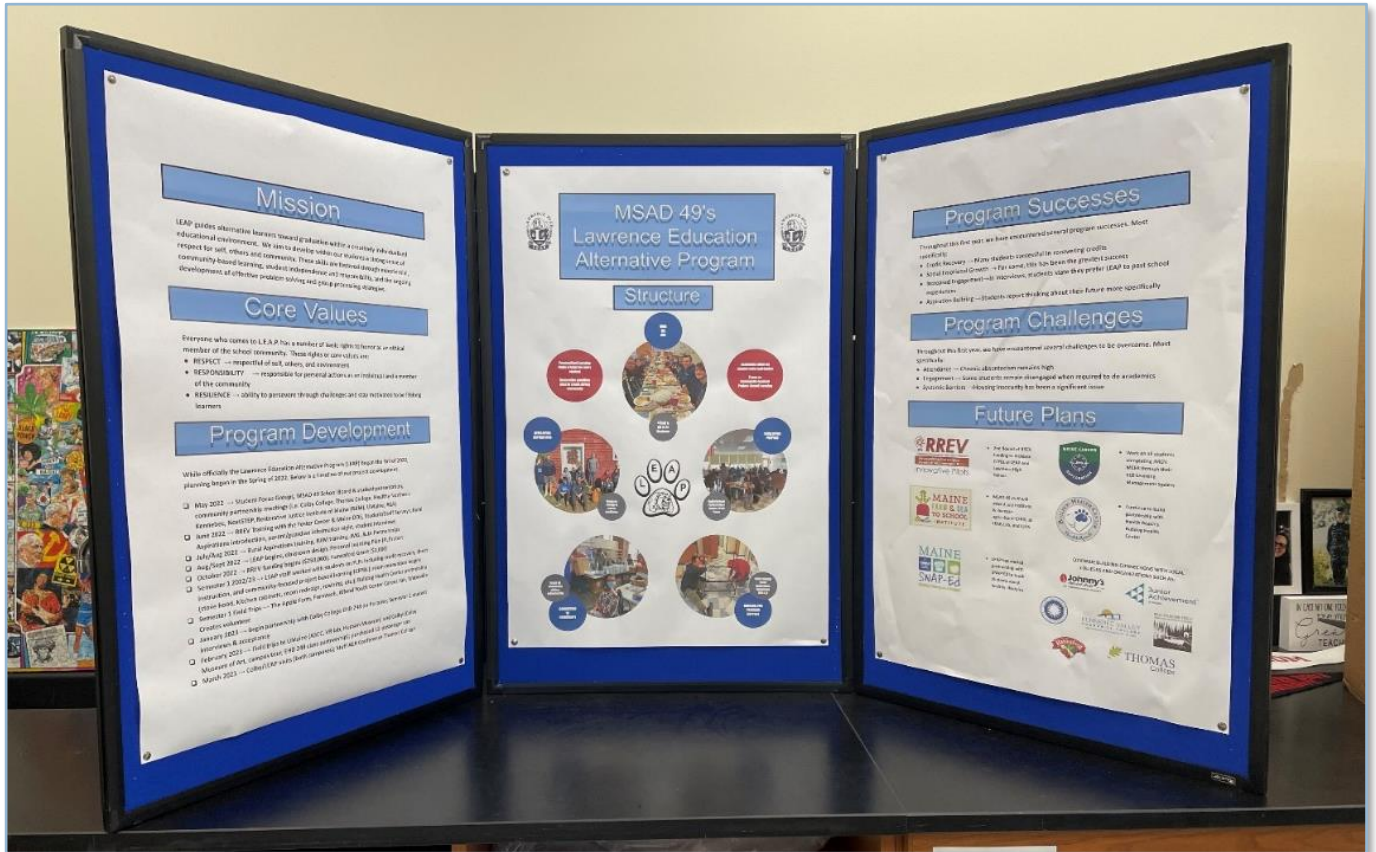
The tips below are intended to give school leaders ideas to consider when developing a Multiple Pathways program for their own school. These key takeaways are based on an external evaluation of the Multiple Pathways pilots supported by the Maine Department of Education's Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures (RREV) program, and can be adapted based on the local needs, opportunities, policies, and cultures of individual schools.

1 Cultivating partnerships with local businesses and community organizations can make Multiple Pathways programs more relevant to students' lives. Students were most engaged in Multiple Pathways programs that offered work-based learning opportunities that were relevant to their lives and visions for the future. Successful Multiple Pathways programs worked closely with partners that had strong roots in the community and could provide students with learning experiences with tangible connections to their daily lives and plans for the future. For instance, schools like school administrative unit (SAU) Lee Academy and SAU Falmouth engage students in service-learning projects with local partners, including trail work, community gardening, water testing, and outdoor learning connected to local ecosystems. These experiences not only enhance students' skills but also contribute to the well-being of the local community by fostering a sense of environmental stewardship and responsibility in students. Furthermore, Multiple Pathways programs contribute to the economic development of communities by creating workforce exposure opportunities. For example, SAU St. George Public Schools facilitates visits to local businesses, providing students with insights into trades and technical fields. Schools interested in creating a Multiple Pathways program could consider creating a community outreach position to focus on finding and fostering partnerships, especially in ways that reflect local needs and culture.

"The pilot program is new, different, and brings the kids to the place they live. Learning that's connected to their community, and connects them to the place they call home. I think that's huge."

– Parent, Falmouth

2 Enlisting support from school leaders and coordination with local institutes of higher education can create smooth transitions for students moving through different educational pathways. Multiple Pathways programs empower students to pursue their interests and career goals through experiential learning opportunities beyond traditional classrooms, and in ways that align with each student's particular interests. While these opportunities promote student engagement, district leadership's engagement and support is important to ensure these experiences are aligned with district policies and that students earn credits. For instance, Lee Academy and Falmouth have implemented outdoor-based integrated curricula that provide students with place-based learning experiences, thereby connecting real-world relevance to instruction. Regional school unit (RSU) 84 (East Grand) aligned its curriculum with standards to teach employability skills, financial literacy, business management, product development, and trades. Such standards-aligned curricula not only provide a framework for meaningful learning but also prepare students for college and career readiness. Engagement with institutes of higher education, such as colleges or trade schools, is also important for aligning Multiple Pathways experiences with their programs and standards. This approach is vital in fostering innovation and responsiveness within education models, as it empowers students to understand the relevance of their learning experiences, promotes agency and responsibility over their education, and expands access to career and technical resources.



Poster created by students at Maine School Administrative District (MSAD) 49 (Lawrence) showing this Multiple Pathways school's program structure.

3 Students benefit from systems and structures to support their mental, emotional, and social well-being as they navigate the greater independence and responsibility often associated with Multiple Pathways programs. A “whole child” focus in Multiple Pathways programs is of paramount importance as it ensures a comprehensive approach to students' development, encompassing not only academic progress but also their mental, emotional, and social well-being. RSU 21 (Kennebunk’s) Alternative Education program serves as a compelling example in which the curriculum, house renovation project, and explicit emphasis on wellness and social-emotional learning are direct outcomes of conversations with students. Recognizing that students entering the program had specific social-emotional needs and histories of adverse childhood experiences, the program intentionally addresses these aspects that may not have been adequately handled in mainstream education settings. Centering students’ lived experiences further enhances the “whole child” focus, tailoring educational pathways to individual needs and creating a novel and exciting learning environment. Lee Academy’s pilot project, characterized by a unique curricular model, has led to increased attendance, positive feedback, and elevated aspirations among students. Similarly, RSU 21 (Kennebunk’s) invests time in developing a responsive curriculum at the beginning of each school year, catering to the unique needs of the student cohort. SAU Wayfinder Schools’ pilot program goes a step further by centering each student’s lived

“Students were excited to come to school and participate. I had students ... who had tremendous growth in social areas, working with people they never would before as well as actually participating and talking in class.”

– Teacher,
MSAD 49

experience, providing individualized instruction and fostering a mentorship role for instructors. In essence, the “whole child” focus acknowledges and responds to the diverse needs and experiences of students, contributing to a more holistic educational approach.

4 **Creating a sense of community among Multiple Pathways students requires intentional effort, and can help students feel more supported and engaged in their learning.** Many students participating in these programs face challenges in mainstream educational settings, experiencing a sense of alienation that can impede their potential for success. The Multiple Pathways program at RSU 21 (Kennebunk) exemplifies the transformative power of community, where students collaboratively renovated a house at a local land trust. Their shared teamwork not only enhanced the learning experience but also instilled a profound sense of accomplishment. Similarly, SAU Maine Indian Education’s pilot project, with its explicit focus on Wabanaki cultural revitalization, recognizes the significance of fostering a learning community. In response to students feeling disconnected from traditional learning, the program places a heightened emphasis on Wabanaki culture, language, and practices, creating an environment where students prioritize their cultural identity.



Interior of a house built at RSU 21 (Kennebunk) for the Multiple Pathways pilot.

5 **Dedicated staff play a crucial role guiding and assisting students along their unique pathways.** For instance, RSU 21 (Kennebunk) hired educational technicians to support the alternative education program, while Falmouth hired an outdoor learning educator to enhance curriculum development and implement place-based learning experiences. Supportive staff play a vital role in facilitating the implementation of Multiple Pathways programs by contributing to the development and alignment of curricula, helping students pursue their interests and career goals, and providing guidance in navigating work-based learning opportunities. Moreover, the hiring of educational technicians and outdoor learning coordinators reflects a commitment to addressing the individual needs of students in alternative education settings.