

Katahdin Schools Supports the Whole Child Through Outdoor Learning

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, Katahdin Schools received a RREV award to develop and implement *Connect, Reach & Teach Each Child with Outdoor Learning*, which began in the 2021-22 school year. MDOE engaged an outside research firm, ICF, to conduct an evaluation of the RREV program, including implementation of this learning model in Katahdin Schools.

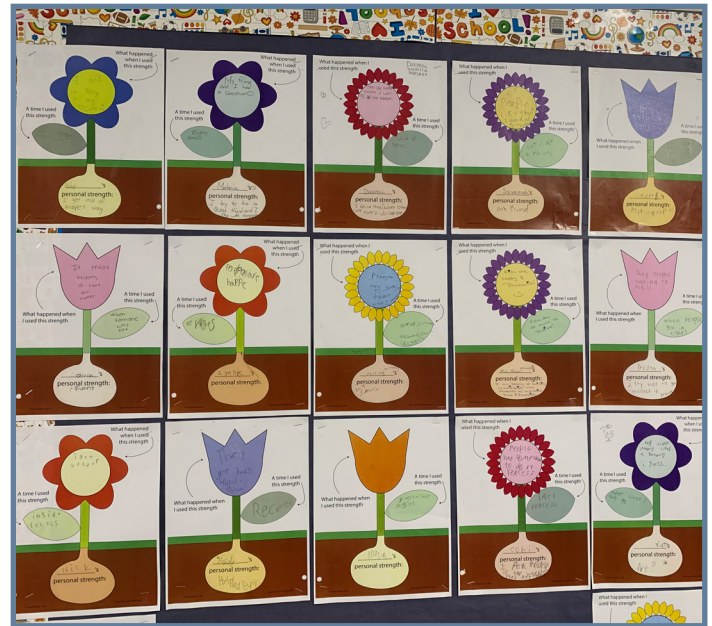


Image: Students draw connections between the classroom and what they learn outside.

What Makes this Learning Model Innovative?

- **Whole-child approach supportive of students' emotional, cognitive, and physical development**
- **Outdoor learning is woven into all pre-K through fifth grades and across multiple subjects**

About Katahdin's Innovative Learning Model

Connect, Reach & Teach focuses on improving students' overall wellbeing and happiness at school. During the 2021-22 school year, implementation was focused mainly on Katahdin Elementary School and involved the following activities:

- Teachers participated in professional development activities focused on outdoor learning, including a two-day summer institute in August 2021 and other activities throughout the 2021-22 school year.
- Teachers and other school staff, including the instructional coach, guidance counselor, and restorative practices coordinator, integrated outdoor learning strategies into educational practices.
- Outdoor paths and other outdoor learning spaces were built to encourage students and teachers to participate in physical outdoor learning activities.
- A "gear library" (consisting of rain boots, pants, cold weather gear, bug nets, and other necessary gear) was created to help overcome climate-related challenges to outdoor learning.

Promising Findings

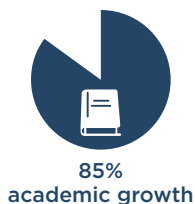
ICF's evaluation of RREV revealed several exciting insights about *Connect, Reach & Teach*. These include:

- **Students were excited about learning outside.** Interviews with teachers and families showed how students have become active, joyful, and engaged learners this year. For example, families reported that children now have an increased or newfound interest in the outdoors and have recently begun asking questions and expressing curiosity about things in nature. Katahdin teachers commented that some students have even begun playing a role in suggesting responsive outdoor learning activities during class time.

- **Students have demonstrated academic growth during the 2021-22 school year.**

Among the 113 elementary students assessed during the 2021-22 school year, 85 percent demonstrated academic growth.

Teachers observed qualitative changes in students' engagement as well, and one teacher remarked that **"this never would've happened had we not been innovative and been supportive of those needs."**



- **Students and families reported positive experiences.**

Seventy-three percent of students agreed that they were glad they participated in the program, and 73 percent agreed that they liked their experience overall; 100 percent of families said that they would recommend this program to other families.



Future Plans

Katahdin is excited to be entering its second year of implementing this innovative learning model! Here are some things Katahdin has planned to ensure the long-term success of *Connect, Reach & Teach*.

- **Program expansion.** Program implementation at the high school will begin in the 2022-23 school year. Specifically, two outdoor learning elective courses will be made available to students in the ninth and tenth grades.



Image: Katahdin's RREV award supports infrastructure for outdoor learning.