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No. 1682

H.P. 1081

House of Representatives, April 18, 2023

An Act to Create the Maine Experiential Education Program

Reference to the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry suggested and ordered printed.

ROBERT B. HUNT

R(+ B. Hunt

Clerk

Presented by Representative SHAW of Auburn.
Cosponsored by Senator INGWERSEN of York and
Representatives: CRAY of Palmyra, GUERRETTE of Caribou, HALL of Wilton, JACKSON of Oxford, JAUCH of Topsham, OSHER of Orono, PLUECKER of Warren, Senator: BLACK of Franklin.

1	Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:
2	Sec. 1. 7 MRSA c. 10-E is enacted to read:
3	CHAPTER 10-E
4	MAINE EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
5	§320-T. Definitions
6 7	As used in this chapter, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.
8 9 10 11 12 13	 Farm and sea to school learning program. "Farm and sea to school learning program" means a program that incorporates agricultural-based education, hands-on learning through school gardens and increased access to local foods through local procurement by school meal programs; improves access to local seafood sourcing by school meal programs; and provides seafood education in schools. Fund. "Fund" means the Maine Experiential Education Program Fund established
14	in section 320-V.
15 16	3. Program. "Program" means the Maine Experiential Education Program established in section 320-U.
17 18	4. Public school. "Public school" has the same meaning as in Title 20-A, section 1. subsection 24.
19 20	5. School administrative unit. "School administrative unit" has the same meaning as in Title 20-A, section 1, subsection 26 and includes a public school.
21 22	6. Student. "Student" means an individual enrolled in prekindergarten to grade 12 in a public school or school administrative unit.
23	§320-U. Maine Experiential Education Program
24 25 26 27 28	1. Program established. The Maine Experiential Education Program is established. The department shall administer the program. In administering the program, the department may collaborate with the Department of Education and other state agencies and nonprofit organizations that support farm and sea to school learning programs, local procurement and other experiential learning initiatives in public schools and school administrative units.
29	2. Purposes. The program shall:
30 31	A. Develop and manage a grant program to help public schools and school administrative units create staff positions that support:
32 33 34	(1) The learning and academic development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to provide experiential hands-on learning;
35 36 37 38	(2) The health and physical development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity necessary to help students build connections between the food that they and their communities produce and the food that they prepare and eat; and

1 (3) The emotional and behavioral development of students by ensuring that public 2 schools and school administrative units interested in the program have the capacity 3 necessary to build, expand and maintain school gardens and other experiential 4 learning spaces; and 5 B. Provide ongoing support to public school educators engaged in hands-on experiential education initiatives for continued education and professional 6 7 development opportunities. 8 §320-V. Maine Experiential Education Program Fund 9 1. Fund established. The Maine Experiential Education Program Fund is established 10 within the department. The fund is nonlapsing and may be invested in the same manner as permitted for investment of other state funds. The fund must be held separate and apart 11 from all other money, funds and accounts. Any balance remaining in the fund at the end 12 13 of the fiscal year must be carried forward to the next fiscal year. 14 **2.** Use of fund. The department shall use money in the fund to: 15 A. Provide multiyear grants to public schools and school administrative units to help establish experiential education positions and outdoor educator positions within the 16 17 schools and school administrative units through a cost-sharing agreement with the 18 following provisions. 19 (1) In the first grant year, the fund covers full salary and benefits, or stipend, of a 20 position; in the 2nd grant year, the fund covers 2/3 the cost for salary and benefits, or stipend, for the same position and the public school or school administrative unit 21 22 covers 1/3 of the cost; in the 3rd grant year, the fund covers 1/3 of the cost of salary 23 and benefits, or stipend, for the same position and the public school or school administrative unit covers 2/3; and in subsequent years the public school or school 24 25 administrative unit covers the full cost of salary and benefits, or stipend, for the same or similar position. 26 27 (2) Grants must be made to public schools and school administrative units in a 28 manner that ensures the public schools and school administrative units create 29 outdoor educator positions that meet the outdoor, experiential or farm and sea to 30 school education needs of the public schools and school administrative units. 31 (3) Grants must be developed and dispersed so that public schools and school 32 administrative units gradually assume full financial responsibility for the positions 33 described in subparagraphs (1) and (2) over a period not to exceed 3 years from the 34 awarding of the grant for any individual public school or school administrative 35 unit. 36 In distributing money from the fund, the department shall prioritize opportunities to expand the range of positions funded by the fund, including such positions as stipend 37 38 garden coaches, educational technicians and teachers; and 39 B. Provide for a staff person within the department to administer the program and the 40 fund. 41

A. All money appropriated or allocated by the Legislature for inclusion in the fund;

3. Fund sources. The following must be paid into the fund:

42

- B. All interest earned from investments of the fund; and
 - C. All money designated for deposit into the fund from any source, public or private.

§320-W. Evaluation and reporting

The department shall monitor and evaluate the program and submit an annual report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over agriculture, conservation and forestry matters and the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters describing the successes and challenges of instituting experiential education in public schools and school administrative units.

§320-X. Rules

The department shall adopt rules to implement this chapter. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

- **Sec. 2. Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute support.** As part of the Maine Experiential Education Program established under the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 7, chapter 10-E, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry may provide support to the Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute in collaboration with the Maine Farm and Sea to School Network, other appropriate state agencies and nonprofit organizations that support farm and sea to school learning and local procurement initiatives in the State's public schools. Support under this section includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that public schools and school administrative units, including those participating in the Maine Experiential Education Program, have access to professional learning opportunities and coaching designed to ensure the creation of achievable goals for the purposes of:
- 1. Enhancing the learning and academic development of students by ensuring that public schools and school administrative units have the capacity necessary to provide the deeper learning and knowledge gained through experiential, hands-on learning; and
- 2. Enhancing access to high-quality, Maine-grown and harvested products through increased local procurement and connections between schools, students and local farms and fisheries

28 SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Maine Experiential Education Program within the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry to oversee a grant program that provides phased-out support for public schools and school administrative units to create staff positions that provide outdoor, hands-on, experiential learning opportunities related to gardens, food and agriculture to improve healthy academic, physical and emotional development for students. It also establishes the Maine Experiential Education Program Fund to provide funding for the program and creates a position within the department to administer the program and the fund. The bill also authorizes the department to support the Maine Farm and Sea to School Institute.