

# Outstanding outdoor education programs recognized

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April 26, 2024



Students learn ice fishing as part of their leadership and outdoor survival skills.

*SUBMITTED PHOTO*



Students are building strong community relationships through its annual Harvest Fest celebration gardens.  
*SUBMITTED PHOTO*

REGION — Outdoor education programs at Franklin County’s Stratton School and the School of Applied Technology were recently recognized in Maine’s Community-Based Outdoor and Environmental Learning (CBEL) Census report. The initiatives were part of a series of five case studies spotlighting high-quality outdoor education in Maine.

The Stratton School was recognized for building strong community relationships through its annual Harvest Fest celebration. The beloved event began in 2017 and is the culmination of the students’ hard work and teachers creating engaging outdoor learning opportunities. The students prepare and organize the entire celebration, from growing and cooking the food, to creating the decor. The school welcomes nearly 150 guests, including relatives and community members.

The seeds of the celebration were first planted in 2015 as sixth-grade teacher Katie Wuori, and the first-grade teacher—now the school principal—Tabitha Emery, agreed to oversee the school’s raised bed gardens. With the support of the Maine Agriculture in the Classroom and Greater Franklin Food Council, the event has now become interwoven into the school’s curriculum to include cooking classes, gardening, nature-based STEM activities, and

learning about local ingredients. A favorite task for students each year is making their own butter using milk from Oakhurst. The kindergarten students even have a song for it. The art teacher, Anne Flight, also facilitates art projects for the event.

“Anytime you can get community members or family members into a school in a positive setting, it’s good because it’s an encouraging environment that the families feel, and the kids feel,” shared Flight.

The Census report also highlighted the Outdoor Skills and Leadership Program at Region 9’s School of Applied Technology in Mexico, ME, as an example of high-quality career and technical education. This unique program was developed by two of the school’s educators, Jon Longley, a Fire Chief, EMT, and Fire Science and Outdoor Skills Instructor for more than 25 years, and Jeff Rainey, a Registered Maine Master Guide, and the school’s Building Construction and Outdoor Skills Instructor.

One of the driving forces behind the program was recognizing that many employment opportunities in their community of the western foothills of Maine are connected to the outdoors. So, Rainey and Longley created the program to prepare 10th through 12th grade students for various careers while teaching them leadership and outdoor survival skills.

Students are educated on topics related to the outdoors and leadership, complete writing assignments, practice public speaking, and focus on building character and community. Rainey believes that if the students can walk away as better people with skills and a community stewardship ethic that can translate to any area of their lives, the program has done its job.

“This type of program is what students need. They need some outdoor time,” said Rainey. “If we’re going to take time for outdoor-related activities, why not use those activities to build better humans and build future leaders?”


Both of these initiatives demonstrate the successes, opportunities, and challenges in community-based outdoor and environmental learning reported in the 2022 CBEL Census. The data-driven Census report tracks trends in the field and offers real-time stats to measure access to environmental education and outdoor learning in Maine.

The Census and case studies were organized by Teach ME Outside, a collaborative project between Maine Mathematics and Science Alliance (MMSA), Maine Environmental Education Association, and the Nature Based Education Consortium. The initiative supports and works in partnership with Maine communities to ensure youth can access powerful, hands-on environmental learning opportunities.

“The census is the most powerful tool we have for informing policy, decision making, and funding in our outdoor education work,” said Alex Brasili of MMSA. “We are one of the first states in the country to launch an initiative like this, and we are thrilled to be able to spotlight

examples of the incredible outdoor education happening around Maine.”

To read these Case Studies and learn more about the 2022 Census visit:  
<https://teachmeoutside.org/case-studies/>

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