

Sparking Innovation in Maine's Classrooms

Project Overview

Maine is primarily rural, featuring uneven population distribution and inequitable access to resources across the state. Educators are hardworking and committed to student success; however, systemic challenges and inequities that were highlighted and exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic continue to exist across schools and districts. Commissioner Makin believes that educators on the ground are best situated to design the interventions, supports, and strategies to address those systemic challenges. The critical role of the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) is to provide the resources and support that empower districts to do so. Commissioner Makin leveraged the U.S. Department of Education's Rethink K–12 Education Models grant to provide significant funding to districts to support innovative solutions to persistent problems of practice—particularly those heightened by the pandemic. MDOE's grant began in fall 2020. It prioritized innovations focused on outdoor education, multiple flexible educational pathways, extended learning opportunities, and online learning.

"We truly consider them thought partners and supportive colleagues in every measure!"

—MDOE staff

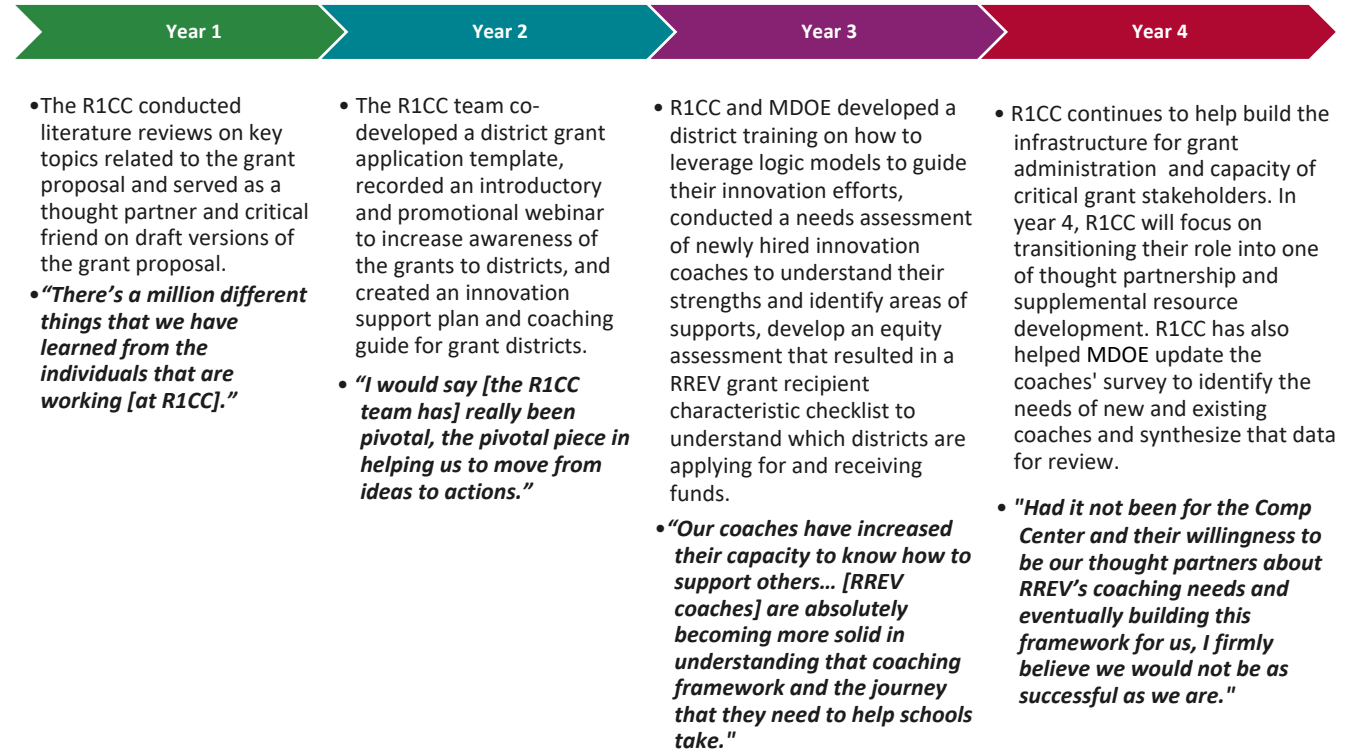
The [Region 1 Comprehensive Center](#) (R1CC) has supported MDOE since the beginning of the project, serving as a thought partner on the grant proposal, co-developing resources to support grant implementation, and developing professional development trainings on grant-related topics.

Grant Reflections

The RREV grant was a critical vehicle for providing local school districts the financial support and autonomy to respond to the COVID pandemic but was also designed to continue to address systemic inequities in Maine's education system beyond the immediate health crisis. To accommodate this focus, R1CC purposefully planned for project sustainability from the onset.

First, the project teams established a truly collaborative working partnership that included biweekly, 90-minute meetings where R1CC and MDOE teams collectively made decisions about tools, resources, and other content; developed new resources using shared documents and collaboration sites; and established project next steps for the next 1–3 weeks. R1CC and MDOE would work on their respective action items in the interim weeks, bringing the results of that work to the next project meeting. R1CC also served as the facilitator, project manager and notetaker during meetings, allowing MDOE staff to focus their limited time on the decisions, resources, and next steps that were most critical for them to complete.

Technical Assistance Approach



Project Outcomes

The MDOE project team has repeatedly praised R1CC’s technical assistance support and the ways it has increased state and local capacity to support innovation in the classroom. MDOE staff have cited the knowledge and expertise provided by the R1CC team as crucial to moving this project forward.

R1CC has also developed MDOE’s resource capacity by creating tangible materials and resources. MDOE staff shared that the resources designed for this project have helped the state and coaches to better support districts and schools in implementing their innovation plans—which in turn helps to maximize RREV funding.

Finally, R1CC is continuing to support MDOE’s organizational structures and functions to support this work. MDOE staff have noted that the organizational processes built through this project have helped make the innovation plans stronger and more equitable.

“I can’t tell you how many schools have said I really love this logic model. Schools and coaches say they’re grateful for what the comp center has helped us develop and developed for us. I think we’re leaps and bounds ahead in terms of capacity to apply [these evidence-based approaches].”

—MDOE project staff member

MDOE clients shared that they have taken the process for building logic models and started using it in other areas of their work and in other MDOE offices. Similarly, the innovation coaching framework produced for this project is being used to help build coaching frameworks for other types of coaching roles in MDOE. In other words, the RREV project has not only built MDOE’s capacity to continue and sustain innovation pilots in the state but has also built capacity for MDOE to improve processes and frameworks for other projects.

“The work the Comp Center team has provided to the MDOE RREV team has been transformative ... both for the ongoing success of the RREV pilots as well as for other MDOE teams who has witnessed the success of RREV. We have no less than three different MDOE teams reaching out to RREV to inquire about our process and supports and requesting input/advice as they try to adopt/adapt some of the same processes.”

—MDOE staff

Awardees in the News

Below is a collection of news stories that highlight how the RREV grant sparked innovation in Maine classrooms. For a full listing of current awardees and to see the RREV grant in action, please visit MDOE’s webpage: [Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures](#).

- [Grant allows RSU 20 to move toward more hands-on curriculum \(The Republican Journal, 2022\)](#)
- [Oxbow outdoor RREV pilot creates new spaces and opportunities for RSU 9 students \(MDOE Newsroom, 2022\)](#)
- [Brewer School Department looks to expand remote learning program \(Newscenter Maine, 2022\)](#)
- [St. George is starting kids early in the trades to keep them in the area \(The Bangor Daily News, 2022\)](#)
- [A Year of Success and Innovation: Rethinking Responsive Education Ventures at MSAD 60 \(MDOE Newsroom, 2022\)](#)