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# News Release

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## Early College for ME to receive award of excellence from New England Board of Higher Education

**Aroostook County** - For Ruth White, regional director for the Early College for ME program, encouraging high school students to go onto College isn't just her job – it's her passion. It's because of that passion and outstanding work of White and her colleagues that the program will be recognized by the New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) with a State Merit Award in early March.

Each year, NEBHE presents Regional Excellence Awards to individuals and organizations that have shown exceptional leadership on behalf of higher education and the advancement of educational opportunity, and State Merit Awards to honor the innovative work of organizations, institutions or individuals in each New England state.

Early College for ME is a comprehensive college transition program that targets high school students who are undecided about higher education but who have the potential to succeed in college. The program serves over 1,700 high school students a year at 74 schools across the state, providing support and guidance throughout the college planning process, the opportunity to take up to two community college courses during their senior year of high school, and scholarships to the community colleges of up to \$2,000. Since 2003, Early College for ME has engaged over 5,200 students, and with available funding, was able to award scholarships to over 1,600 students.

White covers the largest geographic area of any of the six regional directors in the state. Her territory includes Aroostook and Washington Counties, as well as northern Penobscot County. She works collaboratively with both the NMCC and Washington County Community College campuses.

“Since 2003, Early College for ME has helped hundreds of high school students in northern and eastern Maine gain knowledge about themselves and attain college degrees they may never have pursued. Our focus has always been on the student, what we can do to help them be successful. I never give up working with a student in helping them through the difficult decision process of finding the career best suited for them. We provide the students not only with tools but a tremendous amount of personal support and encouragement to help them gain pride and confidence in themselves,” said White. “The award is a wonderful acknowledgment and recognition of the years of work that has been personally enriching and rewarding. We wouldn't be receiving the award if our partners at the high schools and community colleges didn't support us and see the benefits of the program.”

Students are selected for participation in the Early College for ME program by their high school during their junior year. To be selected, students must be in good academic standing and be capable of succeeding in college but have no plans yet for college.

Currently, a total of 12 high schools in White's territory are visited regularly by either herself or a part-time regional coordinator who works on the Washington County Community College campus. On average, 110 high school juniors and seniors, and 25 NMCC students are engaged in the Early College for ME program. Since its inception, 130 students have received the scholarship and continued their education at NMCC.

“Early College for ME has made a real difference in the lives of hundreds of Maine high school students who didn't think college was an option,” said MCCS President John Fitzsimmons. “The program's talented staff has worked tirelessly to support students on the sometimes challenging road to higher education. It's gratifying to see their hard work recognized and even more gratifying to know that what they do, every day, has helped many more young people in Maine access higher education.”

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