



ST. JOHN VALLEY
ADULT AND COMMUNITY
EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE

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St. John Valley Adult and Community Education Collaborative and Northern Maine Community College launch early childhood education program in the St. John Valley

St. John Valley - A need for additional trained early childhood educators in the St. John Valley will be met as a result of a partnership between Northern Maine Community College and the St. John Valley Adult and Community Education Collaborative. Under the arrangement, residents of the St. John Valley will be able to earn an NMCC associate degree in early childhood with all courses offered locally at the St. John Valley Technology Center in Frenchville beginning this fall.

Demand for teachers to work with preschool aged children nationally has grown over the past several months as the new administration's education agenda unfolds. At the same time, work on the state-level, including new regulations for training of educators who work with children from birth through age four, has meant new certification requirements for those currently teaching and others who will enter the profession.

"With the Obama administration's emphasis on early childhood education, including the first three years of life and the development of pre-literacy skills in three and four year olds, there will be an increased need for degree holding early childhood educators across the country and certainly in Maine and in Aroostook County," said Peter Caron, director of SAD 27 Adult and Community Education. "There is currently a children's growth council at work in Augusta preparing legislation for consideration by the state legislature in this biennium. That legislation will have as its focus funding early childhood education opportunities birth to age four in our state. Furthermore, we know that federal Head Start regulations now dictate that all staff will need to hold at least associate degrees in early childhood education, a requirement that replaces the former child development certificate."

Caron, who has been working with his counterpart Christine Cowie, director of the Madawaska/SAD 33 Adult and Community Education, to develop the program through the combined efforts of the St. John Valley Adult and Community Education Collaborative and NMCC also points to an increased emphasis on Early Reading First and Reading First Programs in the school districts and the emphasis on pre- and early literacy programming for children in Family Literacy Programs as further reasons why the need for early childhood education degree holders is likely to become even more paramount.

The two St. John Valley education officials joined NMCC Vice President and Academic Dean Alan Punches at a press conference held today at the St. John Valley Technology Center. The announcement was made before several area high school students and a dozen Valley preschool-aged children who participate in a secondary-level early childhood education training program offered at the regional technology center.

“Not only does this meet an emerging need in this part of the primary region we serve, it will provide a wonderful chance for the high school students here in this classroom to continue their education without leaving home if they so desire. Moreover, we expect that local community members looking to advance in their career or make a change will take advantage of this quality and affordable opportunity,” said Punches.

The NMCC official also expects that currently certified teachers who are teaching pre-kindergarten in the region and who now need to earn an early childhood education endorsement, as a result of recently passed legislation in Maine, will register for some of the course offerings that meet those needs. Punches and NMCC early childhood education instructor Heidi Broad-Smith worked with officials at the University of Maine in Orono a year ago on an articulation agreement between the two schools. Aside from facilitating transfer of credits from NMCC to U-Maine, the agreement in effect paved the way for NMCC to teach courses for the new endorsement that County teachers would have had to otherwise travel outside of the region to complete.

“NMCC is in the unique position to help with the delivery of these courses as we already offer classes specific to the toddler and young child. By articulating with the University of Maine, NMCC is now able to deliver high-quality courses specific to the developing needs in the field,” said Broad-Smith. “Teachers that are already teaching, with their existing certification, and need the specific classes to get the new endorsement, will be able to attend NMCC – and now here locally in the St. John Valley.”

Aside from the convenience and cost savings for the current and future area preschool teachers, the new program offering in the Valley, according to local officials, will give the region a needed economic boost.

“As we continue to grapple with an economic downturn, local availability of quality coursework at an extraordinarily reasonable price will give local citizens the opportunity to pursue a positively regarded associate’s degree which through articulation agreements with the University of Maine campuses can eventually lead to a bachelor’s degree. The simple fact of the matter is that for some residents it would be cost prohibitive to earn this degree by commuting daily to the NMCC campus in Presque Isle and even more cost prohibitive to take on not only tuition but room and board costs by being a full-time campus –based student.”

Courses for the new offering will begin this fall and the entire curriculum will be delivered in the St. John Valley by the adult education sites in the region. For more information on the new offering, contact the SAD 27 Adult and Community Education office at 834-3536 or the Madawaska/SAD 33 Adult and Community Education office at 728-6314.

The St. John Valley Adult and Community Education Collaborative represents a partnership between MSAD #27 Adult and Community Education and Madawaska and MSAD #33 Adult and Community Education. The mission of the collaborative is to work together to offer cost effective and convenient access to quality educational programs.

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Northern Maine Community College Vice President and Academic Dean Alan Punches visits with four-year old Kaden Daigle of Frenchville on the playground at the 1-2-3 Playgroup at the St. John Valley Technology Center after joining with St. John Valley Adult and Community Education Collaborative leaders to announce the expansion of NMCC's Early Childhood Education Program in the St. John Valley.