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HCC gets \$2.4M for early ed programs

By **NATE PROCTER**
For the Gazette

HOLYOKE - Holyoke Community College has received two grants from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care totaling \$2.4 million to fund a new professional development program and training workshops for early childhood educators.

HCC is the lead agent on a \$2 million Career Pathways Grant in partnership with Berkshire Community College and Greenfield Community College. The grant covers tuition, fees and associated costs like textbooks, laptops and the \$420 Child-

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hood Development Associate Plus (CDA Plus) credentialing fee. This allows early educators to attend classes for no cost other than transportation.

“There’s a lot of brain research that says (age 0-5) is the most critical developmental stage for children, so it’s really important to increase the education and quality of care provided to children by supporting their teachers,” said Kimm Quinlan, director of Early Childhood Grant Initiatives at HCC.

The CDA Plus program will help both students and early education workers already in the field earn their CDA credentials so they can advance their careers. Students in the program can earn up to 16 college credits they can apply toward an associate degree program in early childhood education.

The program consists of four, sequential, seven-week courses such as childhood behavior and development, early childhood programs, and health, safety and nutrition.

Each course is worth three credits, coupled with a one-credit online course. Classes are held on Saturday mornings for the convenience of students, who must be working 20 hours per week in the field to qualify for the program. In addition, two one-credit classes will take place in January and August over two week periods.

“Taking one course at a time will mean those educators won’t be overworked,” Quinlan said. “Having classes on weekends means more full-time educators will be able to attend.”

Tricia Kiefer, Chair of Edu-



Former early childhood education major Cindy Soriano of Northampton, and a Holyoke Community College graduate, reads to pre-school students in Springfield during a service-learning project.

CHRIS YURKO/HOLYOKE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

cation at HCC, is teaching the first seven-week course of the CDA Plus program: Child Development and Behavior 104. She also lectures the regular weekday version for full-time students. She said there is no difference between the classes, which was very important to the institution.

“Students get exactly the same content as if they took it in a traditional class during the week,” Kiefer said.

The only difference is the

audience. Saturday attendees must be working full-time in the field to be eligible for enrollment. CDA Plus students also have access to the schools’ support services like academic advising for free.

The first group of 20 students in the CDA Plus program started Sept. 7 at HCC.

Student Katie Levesque is among them and said she is more than grateful to be able to study again, this time without a bill to pay. She said her

classes are going “really well” so far and although there is substantial work outside the classroom, “everybody seems to be really grasping the material.”

Kiefer agrees that her students are engaged, starting their classes with many questions and with notable community support within the classroom.

For the first few weeks, classes have discussed basic theories of development and

how pre-natal behaviors affect child development. Soon they will be moving on to a “huge section” covering social and emotional development, Kiefer said.

Sheila Gould lectures the online one-credit course Healthy Environments and Relationships in Early Education Settings. This course assists early educators with information about their field. Levesque says it helps a lot to have this support.

“All I can say is more of these grants would be awesome,” Levesque said.

Although HCC is the lead agent for the grant that funds the program, Berkshire Community College and Greenfield Community College will independently develop their own learning curriculums.

HCC also unveiled in the press release their new status as the Early Education and Care’s professional development center of western Massachusetts thanks to the Strong Start Training and Technical Assistance Grant.

A second grant worth nearly \$400,000 establishes HCC as EEC’s professional development center for western Massachusetts. The Strong Start Training and Technical Assistance grant will offer stand-alone, five-hour workshops on and off campus and provide training, coaching and technical assistance to early childhood programs.

“It’s all training around early childhood issues,” Quinlan said. “So it could be curriculum development, environmental setup, behavior management, interactions, observation, STEM activities or literacy for children under five years of age.”

Attendees will be able to earn Continuing Education Credits, which are used to document early childhood educators’ training experience. The Childhood Development Association requires that teachers receive 20 hours of training per year.

Strong Start training sessions begin in November and Quinlan said the goal is to train 1,500 to 2,000 people from Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden counties.