

EDUCATION

LOCAL COLLEGE

HCC Secures More Than \$2 Million to Support Early Education Professionals



Former Early Childhood Education major Cindy Soriano '19 of Northampton, now an HCC graduate, reads to pre-school students in Springfield during a service-learning project. Photo by Chris Yurko

HOLYOKE, MA – Holyoke Community College has been awarded two grants worth more than \$2 million to support the education and training of early childhood educators and the programs they work for in western Massachusetts.

Both grants come from the Mass. Dept. of Early Education and Care, which licenses public and private childcare programs in the state.

HCC is the lead agent on a \$2 million Career Pathways Grant that will establish new professional development certification programs at the

college as well as at Greenfield Community College and Berkshire Community College, HCC's partners in the western Mass. consortium. The programs, called Childhood Development Associate Plus (or CDA Plus), will help early childhood educators already working in the field attain their national CDA credential or enhance their certification level within the EEC system.

Participants can also earn up to 16 college credits they can apply toward an associate degree program in

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Early Childhood Education.

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

The first group of 20 students in HCC’s CDA Plus program started Sept. 7. The two-semester course of study includes four, sequential, seven-week, three-credit courses in subjects such as childhood behavior and development, early childhood programs, and health, safety and nutrition, with two, two-week, one-credit classes meeting in January and next summer. Classes are held on Saturday mornings for the convenience of students, who must be working at least 20 hours a week in the field to qualify.

The grant covers all tuition, fees, and associated costs, including books and the \$420 CDA credentialing fee.

“EEC has an expectation that these educators will get certifications or degrees and they also understand that they often don’t make enough money to pay for it,” Quinlan said. “That’s why they create opportunities like this to provide support so it can be done in an affordable way.”

A second group of CDA Plus students will start at HCC in spring 2020 and continue through next fall. Quin-

lan said she expects the grant will renewed for the following academic year.

The second award, called the Strong Start Training and Technical Assistance Grant, is worth nearly \$400,000 and establishes Holyoke Community College as the EEC’s professional development center for western Massachusetts.

HCC, working with UMass Boston as the lead agent, will offer a series of stand-alone, five-hour workshops on and off campus and provide training, coaching and technical assistance to early childhood programs working on their Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), a methodology used to assess early childhood programs.

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

The trainings will be offered days, nights and on some weekends, and attendees will be able to earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

Strong Start trainings will begin in November.

“We are hoping to train 1,500 to 2,000 people, drawing from all of western Massachusetts: Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin and Hampden counties,” said Quinlan. ■