

STCC wins state Career Pathways Grant for early childhood education

SPRINGFIELD – Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) will apply a \$296,904 state grant to support a new affordable professional development program for early childhood educators.

The funding will allow STCC to roll out its Child Development Associate Plus program this fall. The program will help early childhood educators obtain certification and become better qualified to teach infants and toddlers as well as preschool-aged children.

STCC announced in July the college received the Early Childhood Education Career Pathways Grant, funded through the state Department of Early Education and Care.

Those who may be interested in the program include center-based teachers, family child care providers and other early care professionals who are working toward becoming qualified teachers of young children.

“A lot of early childhood educators have been teaching for a long time without having any college credit,” said Richard Greco, dean of Liberal and Professional Studies at STCC. “What this program will allow is for people to get a nationally recognized credential. With the credential, they will earn college credit that they can apply toward an associate degree from STCC.”

STCC’s Early Education and Care Pathways Grant and Activity Director Nancy Ward added, “This program hopefully will increase teacher qualifications. An industry assessment found there was



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A STCC student created this project in a course called Curriculum for Early Childhood, which is a class CDA students will take.

a need for qualified teachers at the early childhood level, which extends from birth to 5 years old.”

Greco and Ward said students who earn the CDA Plus credential could see higher wages. Typically, early childhood educators without any college credit or credentials take home lower-than-average salaries.

The Career Pathways Grant provides a range of support for students in the program at STCC. Funding will pay for a new bilingual position, Early Childhood

Education Liaison. The person hired for the job will work closely with early childhood students and will be able to speak Spanish and English.

“The liaison will recruit and help them get through the admissions process,” Greco said. “The individual will help them obtain applications and their transcripts and will assist with financial aid. The process can be daunting at times.”

Additionally, the grant will be used to update an old computer lab. Students will have use of the state-of-the-art lab with

access to wireless hotspots and computers to borrow if they don’t have one at home.

Classes will be held Tuesdays and Thursdays evenings, and the program is estimated to take one year to complete. Students can come to STCC on Wednesday night for tutoring or to meet with the liaison for support.

Students who need extra support in math and English can take a free one-week boot camp prior to the start of the fall semester.

STCC also will offer a “prior learning credit,” which means anyone who already has earned a CDA from another institution may qualify for college credit from STCC.

Greco noted that the program is not only affordable; it may be free for most of the students. He said 80 percent of the early childhood education students are eligible for federal Pell Grants, which do not have to be paid back. The maximum Pell Grant award will cover the cost of the program.

The state grant pays for two of the courses and for the textbooks.

“This is an opportunity to come here to get a meaningful education where you’re able to give back to your community, where you’re able to feel fulfilled at the end of the day knowing you’re able to make a difference for future generations,” Greco said. “Study after study says that children in quality early childhood education programs – be it home care or center-based care – tend to fare much better in the first three years of their elementary school education. It sets the foundation.”