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## New Educational Partnership Sharing Responsibility, Resources to Improve K-12 Teaching and Learning

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# COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## *Selected News Releases*

### **New Educational Partnership Sharing Responsibility, Resources to Improve K-12 Teaching and Learning**

A new partnership forged on common goals to improve K-12 teaching and learning is off to a strong start this fall, with expanded representation and an ambitious agenda.

The Penobscot River Educational Partnership: A Professional Development Network (PREP: PDN), unites the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development and seven area school systems in a collaborative effort that links all areas of teacher preparation and professional development. The network is based on sharing and strengthening resources and expertise.

Officially established this summer, the network represents the merger of two area groups of educational leaders with similar and often overlapping school improvement objectives. The new, common-goal partnership is the result of two years of cooperative work to create the structure, programs, commitment and flexibility to challenge traditional educational strategies and address future challenges collaboration

PREP: PDN schools and districts include: Brewer; Bucksport; Old Town; SAD 22 (Hampden, Newburgh, Winterport); Union 87 (Orono, Veazie); Union 90 (Alton, Bradley, Greenbush, Milford); the Indian Island School; and the UMaine College of Education and Human Development.

"One of the more fascinating dimensions of the network is working our way through the decision-making process as full partners and with genuine participation when each unit is governed by different policy boards," said Dean Robert Cobb.

For the first time, UMaine and the public schools are participating in decisions that previously have been wholly the prerogative of one or the other. "We've adopted the goal of helping their students learn as the primary purpose of being in the schools, which places all of us in the role of decision making around instructional strategies, student assessment and continually improving the educational experience at all levels," said Cobb.

Teacher preparation and K-12 education are a campuswide responsibility, said Cobb, noting that the majority of an aspiring teacher's program of study is through the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Associate Dean Virginia Ness-Hatlen now represents LSA

on the PREP: PDN Steering Committee, and College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture Associate Dean Alan Kezis is a liaison to the Network.

Through General Education Requirements and academic concentrations, more than 50 percent of an elementary education major's work is done in other UMaine colleges. For secondary education students, academic work in other colleges is more than 85 percent of their overall program.

"Involvement of these colleges is a key factor in the continuing development and success of the Network and educational reform," said Cobb.

Union 90 Superintendent A. Keith Ober was elected chair of the organization at its October meeting. He describes the initiative as the most "extensive level of partnering" and "most involvement between public schools and a university" he has seen in his career.

Partnership members have committed to a collaborative process that, among other initiatives, calls for:

- continuous assessment of learning
- monitoring, evaluating and adapting educational innovations
- providing continuing professional development of practicing teachers
- guiding the professional development of the next generation of teachers
- conducting systemic inquiry and research to address critical issues of teaching and learning

The Network schools provide a supportive base and realistic setting for

UMaine Education majors to do field experiences and student teaching and to apply course theory in the classroom, under the guidance of experienced teachers and University faculty who teach together and separately, both at the schools and on campus

The partnership structure is framed around a steering council, a community advisory forum and four committees — Systematic Inquiry and Research, Professional Development, Teacher Preparation, and Resources and Support.

A core group of more than 40 university/public school faculty and administrators has been actively involved in the planning and organizational process. Already, the Network has piloted professional development and other programs, surveyed teachers about needs and current practice, applied for grants, sponsored seminars on timely topics, shared the work of a technology consultant, sponsored research conferences and published three editions of a newsletter.

Plans currently call for collaborative programs and activities to address pressing educational issues such as state and national performance-based learning standards and achievement assessments, research, policy and best practice, pre-service learning and induction, technology capacity-building and innovation, and challenging student behaviors.

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